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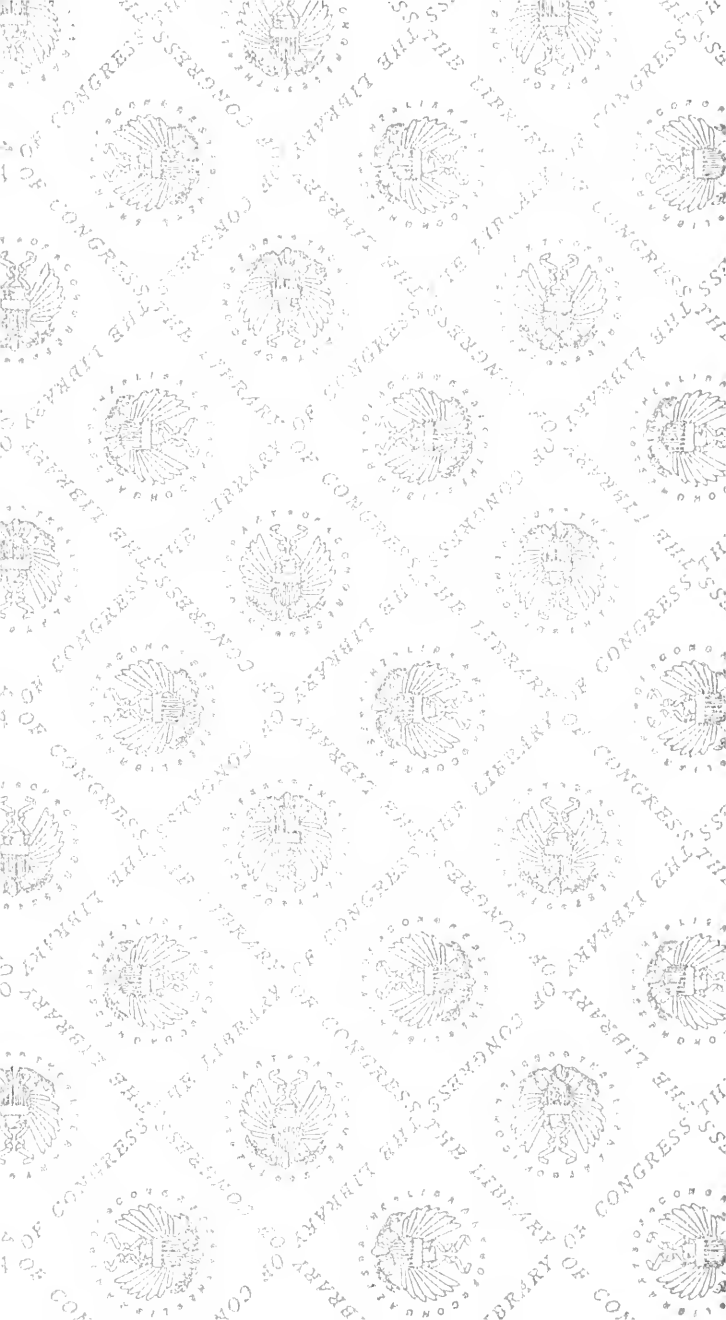
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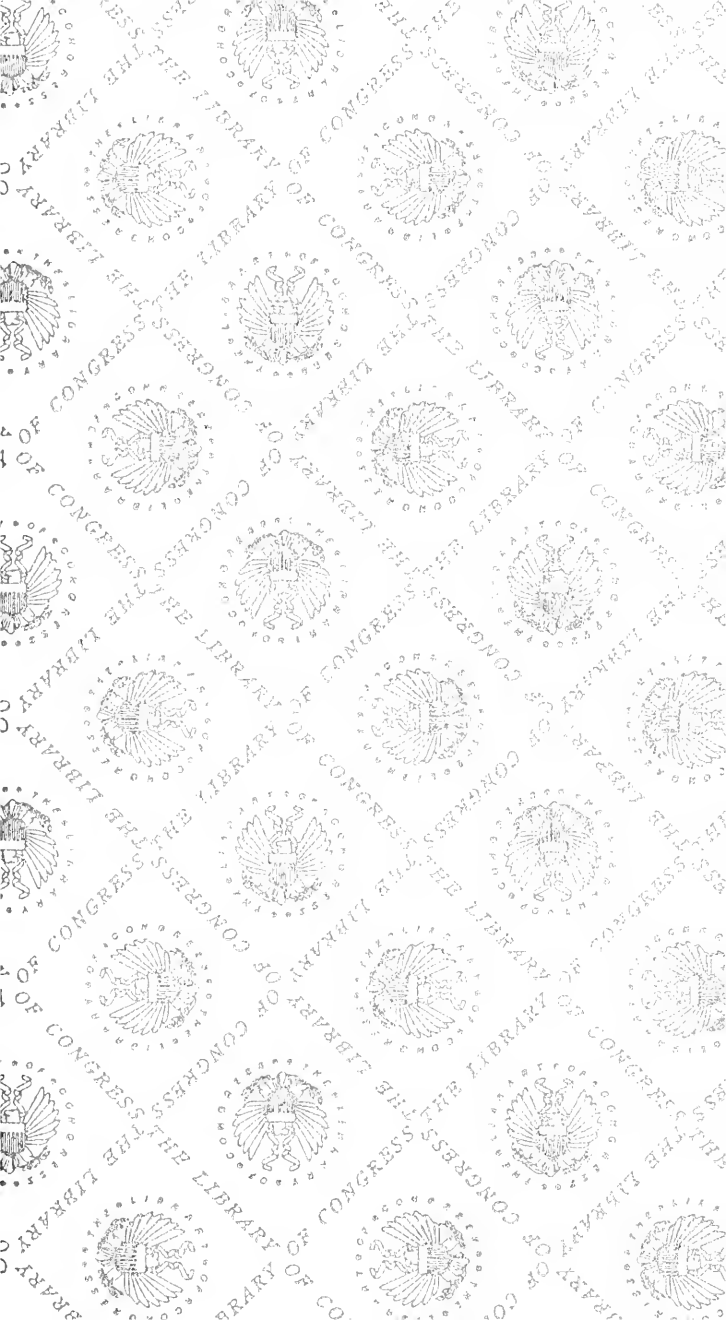
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The Knight of the Chinese Dragon

Books by
JAMES CLOYD BOWMAN

The Gift of White Roses

(Second Revised Edition)

A tragedy in which the village gives of its young man-
hood and its young womanhood unto
Organized Vice.

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The Knight of the Chinese Dragon

The romance of a youthful Knight who
dreamed a prodigious dream of
world conquest.

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The Knight of the Chinese Dragon

By
JAMES CLOYD BOWMAN

"He was a verray parfit gentil knyght"
—Chaucer.



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by
James Cloyd Bowman

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TO THE MULTIPLIED THOUSANDS
EVERYWHERE WHO HAVE TOILED
OVER LAND AND OVER SEA THE
WORLD AROUND IN QUEST OF
THE HOLY GRAIL THIS STORY
I S D E D I C A T E D

FOREWORD

Romance is as much alive as ever. We hate to admit it. We prefer very much our earthen gods of materialism and our pretended physical comforts. But the fact remains, that the world was never more bored with its commonplace self than today. Our religions, our laws, our educational systems, our social standards,—everything, is in a state of ferment. If a man but sleep soundly over night, he must needs awaken to find himself outclassed by some visionary who has not slept at all. To be a conservative is to be a decade behind the times. We are—if such a thing were possible—more greedy for the new and the sensational than were the Greeks.

Poetry, too, is as much alive as ever. This we refuse to admit. Instead, we revel in the far away happy times of Merry England, when every bush had its songster, and when life was one long roundelay of ready wit. Yet, more poetry is intelligently and feelingly read today than ever before. And more poetry, too, is sifting into our common workaday world than ever before. We are coming to dress for the eye, to eat for the palate, to live for the insatiable sensations. Our only trouble is that we are not yet so far removed from the obsolete dominance of physical science but that we are still

afraid to expose our shivering souls to the stifling gaze of the noisy realists.

These facts find expression in the youthful Knight who haltingly treads the measures of this romance. Naïve and visionary, he is not aware that he can never stake his dreams to a sod foundation. He treads upon thin air and believes it granite. He knocks his head against the merest vapor and believes it adamant. Like every romantic poet, who has weathered in our unkindly climes, he rapidly frets his soul to tatters.

The life of this Knight, together with the thousands of his fellows who have slipped unseen from our shores to help quicken the fossilized races of the East into modern life, will be frescoed in letters of gold, when the epic of Awakening China is finally written. We shall then comprehend that the Anglicizing of the Orient has been accomplished while we have slumbered and slept. We shall then turn long enough from our militarism and our commercialism to understand, perchance, that the great awakenings of this world must of necessity ever come about through the changing—not the outer—but of the inner man.

J. C. B.

Ames, Iowa, November, 1913.

The Knight of the Chinese Dragon

Love sighing tripped adown the limpid lake,
Whither two lovers facing dreamed and smiled.
Their blithe canoe, lapping smooth lily pads,
Rocked lightly to the rhythm of the waves.
The day departing shed its peace serene;
And in his ethered stride, majestically
The sun went loitering down the lengthening evening,
And smiling cast an high and holy hush
Over the brow of the thankful worshipful world,
As beaming in luxury, he turned his face
And touched the heavens with myriad flooded splendors.
The fleecy feathery clouds, alight with passion,
Ambled as noiselessly as inward nuns,
With thoughts too deep and hidden for the earth;
The trees stood tiptoe with their upturned heads
Aflame with light; the birds made melody;
The shadows flitted in and out the wood
Like fairy lovers dancing wingedly;
The flowers perfumed the nuptial bed of spring:
Nature upon all sides afire pursued
The guileless newborn spirit-child of June;
The meanest clod leapt up into a soul,
And blindly felt the breathings of the season,
And knew that life and love walked now abroad.
Silently a star awoke as twilight fell.

The Knight of the Chinese Dragon.

JEAN:

Yes, Lillian, far away my sail is set,
Where June eternally reigns unperturbed.

Thus laughed the lover in a buoyant mood,
Trying to chase away the hidden prick
Of fear.

LILLIAN:

You dream—Why not awake?—The week
So soon to come will fling us far apart,—
Me to my distant mountain home, and you
Upon the plains.

JEAN:

I do not dream. New life
Has overwhelmed my waking startled spirit.
My journey you must know; it may not chance
An opportunity again will come
Before we part.—A dreamy nestling lake,
A pearly dewdrop on Wisconsin's breast,
A jewel clasped between her vernal hills,
Geneva, whose open soul betrays its depths;
It drinks in all the varied splendors thrown
Above it in the airy sky of heaven,
With scarce a trace or taint of nether earth;
Within its welling bosom pristine springs
Flow constantly, and cleansing purify.
It is a lake of many minds and moods,
In constant change beneath the elements;

The Knight of the Chinese Dragon.

Always the same yet ever different;
In every mind and mood most beautiful.
Here gather every June a company
Of rugged men, the best and reddest blood
The colleges of fifteen states can offer,
Men of muscle, men of mind and men
Of morals, men of many moods and minds;
But yet in every mind and mood still men.
They come to camp within the vernal wood;
To feel the eyes of all the infinite stars
Above them keeping vigil while they slumber;
To catch a vision of life's rightful sphere;
To gain control of their arch enemy,
The ego, to master passion, yea, to form
A purpose dominant, commensurate
With life's full waiting opportunities;
To look the future in the open face,
And flinch not under any cost, if work
And duty strike them squarely on the breast;
To plan as does the skillful architect
Upon the eve of building, so that space
And time may all be utilized, so that
The structure, when it rears its stately form
Against the elements, may stand unique
In unity complete, and challenge change;
So that the builder satisfied may say,
This is the best that in this given space
Could be constructed; my eye is satisfied.

LILLIAN:

A real dream, but what has it to do
With all the poesy of sunny climes
That you are entering your life upon?

JEAN:

I fear to tell you, Lillian; you will think
Me but a passive feather, drifting here
And there, whichever way the wind may blow,
Never quite sure of anything in life.
Once, you remember, when I let you see
The inner lining of my future hopes:
A happy peaceful dew-kissed sun-crowned hill,
Capped with a cosy cottage built for four,
Shaded with elms and fanned with breezes fresh
In clover secrets, and a rolling farm
Borne down with all the vintage of the year;
A gleeful girl with burnished yellow tresses,
Trailing the sunshine whitherso'er she passed,
The miniature reflection of her mother,
Who with silvery voice and cheery spirit, changed earth
To paradise; a rougish boy, with eye
Like to the buckeye when the autumn frosts
Reveal its fruitage, full of elfish pranks,
A real boy, to set the house in uproar,
And to fill the aging years with youth and joy.
And then I read this bit of verse to you:

I've an empty bower on yonder hill,
With windows wide and door ajar,
Awaiting a songster from afar;
It is furnished fit for any queen;
About it the flowers play hide and seek
As they trip the loitering laughing breeze
Which scampers among the fruit-laden trees;
At the foot of the hill, a brook with its song
Goes threading the grain-burdened fields along.

Around my bower on yonder hill
Are songsters young and songsters rare,
Are songsters sweet and wondrous fair;
And they sing to me out of their sunny souls,
And laughingly glance with their roguish eyes,
As they half invite themselves to my bower;
And then in a fit, scold hour after hour,
For they think me dull and snail-like slow,
That I do not guess what I ought to know.

And there in my empty bower on the hill,
I can keep one bird and only one;
And her presence shall be as the rising sun,
And her eyes as light as the laughing stars;
She shall be bound, yet more than free;
She shall pillow the wings of my soul on her breast,
And the sweets of our joys will go ever unguessed,
Her song is the only song I shall hear,
And her voice, the only voice that will cheer.

And there to my bower on yonder hill,
With its waiting door and window wide,
Daily expecting its happy bride,—
In the whole wide world, if every bird
Were mine for the asking, I would ask but one;
If that one failed to heed my voice,
And all the others would wait my choice,
I would bolt the door gainst every one,
And live a hermit till life was done.

And now that my bower on yonder hill
Awaits that bird and her cheery song,
Awaits in expectancy so long ;
And now that I have found the bird,
The only one in all the world;
And now that she sits here close at my side
And opens her mirthful eyes very wide;
Will she fly to my bower this happy day,
Flinging her spirited songs away?

You remember how you laughed and childlike clapped
Your supple hands, and then assumed a frown;
And cried a poet had at last been born,
Though with no chance of mating in such bowers
Since fairy-land was banished long ago,
Since Aladdin himself with magic lamp
Could never contemplate such winged dreams.
And then I spun my trembling thread of hope,
That you with sunny tresses, laughing eyes
Were soul and sinew of my dream of dreams.

You pouting blushed and scampered away, leaving
Me but a doubting Thomas for my pains.
And then you whispered when we met again,
Your feeling was for friendship, not for love;
And stammered, though I knew it all assumed.

LILLIAN:

Are you aware that women are mysteries
Beyond the ken of those who trust their reason?—
But why relate a foolish wornout story;
Unfold this latest product of your fancy.—
I think I comprehend; some other woman,
The crystal lake reflected in her eyes,
Its minds and moods how like a woman's heart.
I knew you fickle, wherefore plied my art
While you were gone.—I doubt not you have heard?
Well, he is such a striking gentleman,
And spins his daring dream with perfect grace:
A stone-front dwelling on the avenue,
With diamond rings and necklace, and a flood
Of unguessed pleasures. When I laughed and blushed,
And pouting fled indoors, he cursed his stars,
And bit his burning lips and clenched his fists;
Amused, I pitied from behind the screen
His half hour agony.—My telltale mood
Is spent; and now you think me false and cruel;
Forget my interruption, coin your dream.

Jean was a figure for the sculptor's art,
As changed to stone he heard light Lillian through.
His eyes scanned many scenes they looked not at;
His ears caught many sounds that never came
From outward air, his mind groped through a maze
He could not fully fathom or comprehend.

JEAN:

Ah Lillian, I had never thought you thus.
Souls can interpret rightly what they feel;
The lips may quip and jest, but the heart never;
The mind may try to add its sums, but souls
By intuition reach results they know,
Although they cannot tell what two and two
May equal. How can I reveal to light
What is to me more sacred than my life,
When I well know a warbly roguish laugh
Will set my mind in uproar and confuse
What I by burning hours of toildrawn thought
Alone upon the hillside with my God
Already have decided, pledged and sworn,
Soul answering unto pregnant soul unseen?

LILLIAN:

Is this another mask you hide behind?
I only asked to see the naked breast
Of your dreams.

JEAN:

But who can plan his life
As one might cast the journey of an hour?
Life means a home and mother.

LILLIAN:

But you have
A mother and a home.

JEAN:

Well plague you must,
So do not cease; my humor I have lost
Tonight, and dullness pricks me to the quick.

LILLIAN:

But tell about the sunny climate, Jean,
Where all the circle of the year is June,
And where no woman chills the air with jests.

JEAN:

No Lillian, not tonight, another time;
Dreams without souls lend but to fancy corpses.

LILLIAN:

But please do, Jean; a mummy I shall be;
And if you hear me breathe, know I am dreaming;
Tell me, for I so much want to know.

And thus the woman, curious as of old,
Drew from the man unwillingly his dream.

JEAN:

A sunny climate, did you say; yes, winter
Never breathes on that far China town,
Hoary with the history of centuries,
Enslaved in sin six thousand years and more;
Groping but blindly for a God to break
Its shackles and remove the weight that lies
Upon its weakened will; to recreate
Again the imprint of His character
Upon its faded features, and drive out
Its wretched poverty and devilish filth.
A humble modest dwelling with meager rooms,
Adorned but poorly, with no show of wealth;
No diamond there except the sparkling eye
Deep wrought with truth and service for the race.
Thus set down in heathendom, without
The opportunities our world-famed land
Of freedom breathes upon her native born
Each day for their contentment and enjoyment;
A land where long-drawn years of dogged study
Must be consumed to gain the point of view
Of its queer people and their language learn
That one may lead them out of their drawn shells
Of fossilized tradition into truth;
A life given up to service and to toil,
Much harassed with failure and discouragement,
Perchance to end in martyrdom; a life
Of hardship, yet a life of rare deep joy,
Such as a selfish mind cannot conceive,

For service ever has its mystic halo,
Though unseen by vulgar eyes.

LILLIAN:

Enough!

A sort of fabled Knight of the Chinese Dragon!
You?—Absurdity should curb itself!
I wish I had not drawn from you this dream.

And thus her woman curiosity
Had struck her dumb; she blindly groped for light.
But Jean was now illumed, he scarcely heard
What Lillian said.

JEAN:

I see the Chinese heart,
Calloused and shriveled, groping in ignorance
Among the thousand maxims of his race,
Starving for want of freedom and of light;
Not knowing that the God who made his world
And him, loves him also, with such a love
That sin beneath its contemplation withers
And atrophies, and hope and faith unfold
And yield a harvest rich in loving deeds
And full-poised life. I hope to see a few—
Perhaps a dozen—Chinamen accept
My God through my life's labor, and set out
To win their fellowmen; I hope to hear
A number thank me that I came so far
To tell them life's sealed secret, ere I die;
I hope to have a helpmate in that hut,

To cast a holy joyous longing through
The lives of all she meets; to radiate
With sunny sweetness in a land that knows
Not what a woman's rightful sphere may mean;
To teach them of the loftier womanhood.
I hope that she can ever draw the best
And sweetest fragrance of my soul from me,
And that I in return can draw the best
And highest that her being holds from her;
Thus mated, to live out the crowded years;
And when at length the evening shadows fall,
To lay us down upon that foreign soil
In peace serene, knowing that we have done
The best that was implanted in our lives.
Again my little verse I bring to you;
This is the life I had dreamed that we might live:

It matters not
Though the way be steep and the journey long;
It matters not,
Whether praise or blame bursts from the throng;
We shall journey ever on and on,
Across the hills, in the ruddy dawn;
We shall bathe our cheeks in the golden wine
Of the dewy breeze and glad sunshine;
We shall kiss the forget-me-not's blue bell
As we loitering dance adown the dell;
We shall drink the deeper of heaven's own blue
Since I am I and you are you.

It matters not
Though the way be steep and the journey long;
It matters not;
We shall toiling sing life's olden song;
And passing hear the growing call
Of those who falter and those who fall;
We shall cheer the downcast and right the wrong,
As we spill our joys the way along;
We shall lift the fallen and lead the blind,
And cheer the weak who lag behind;
We shall drink the health of the good and the true,
Since I am I and you are you.

It matters not
Though the way be steep and the journey long;
It matters not;
We shall rest at length as time speeds on;
We shall pass adown the vale bereft,
And one be taken, the other left;
But throughout the shade of the twilight gloom,
Love's olden star serene will bloom,
And the moistened eye will understand
That the other awaits with outstretched hand,
And will not e'en heaven alone pursue,
Since I am I and you are you.

And as he read, unconsciously he pulled
The idle oar, and tore a lily bud
From its groping stem, ere its rich chalice saw
The light of day; unseen another bud

He tore quite knowingly from its loose roots,
And love went dashing on the shoals of fate,
Not to return for many weary days.

LILLIAN:

The air is chill; let's hasten home; I wish
I had not heard your story.

JEAN:

Well, 'tis told;
I know you think it foolish and beneath
The high ambition of any college man.

And so beneath the galaxy of heaven
They hastened, Lillian leaning on Jean's arm,
Trembling as a wounded dove lost from its mate;
And Jean striding ungainly as a ghost,
Soulless and white as marble. Upon the step
They parted with a frozen courtesy.

II

Across the threshold of her chamber; poor girl!

LILLIAN: (Alone, musing)

What have I done? My witchery at last,
Weak weapon of my womanhood, has quite
Miscarried: poor belabored lies, that I
Have piled one upon one, one upon one,
And told my fancy he would never see;
Poor silly subtleties, weak braggart boasts,
Where are your clever bickerings tonight?
How slight a gale can topple o'er a wrong
Set sail; how meagre a lie can set two lives
Adrift; weak men court lies, and gloat upon
Their fair deceivers, but men of guileless lips
Expect a woman's heart to speak the truth.
Here I have been deluded; of all the graces
Of our womankind, none is so charming
As a faultless womanhood, that seeks
No guiles, that stands with open face.
I have so underestimated Jean;
Roguish he is at times and full of jest;
But he never strains tiptoe and never stoops;
His life is clean and loyal, brave and true.
But I have tried to hide my many faults,
Have tried to overestimate myself
To him, have feared he would not love me lest
I ever tried to force him. What a fool!
Souls interpret each other neither in jest nor lie;

But deeper by some subtler power than mind,
Much as the fragrance of a flower is felt.
How weak I am!—But what is that? Midnight!
And I here fretting like a caged bird.
Ha! ha! I wonder what the girls would say
If they should see my swollen eyes, my hair
Disheveled! Ha! Ha! I will play my game;
Jean, too, shall taste despair; he shall be jealous
Ere the week is half worn out.

And thus

The war between the true and the false went on.
Some natures have a curious temperament
Of good and bad; some bicker against odds they know
Are sure to overwhelm them; still they fight.
Discretion in a woman and all the powers
That yield deceit, belong within the head,
Wretched the heart that feeds upon such soil.
Lillian, when at length her burning cheek
Touched the soft pillow, when her lips last moved
Before she dreamed, although no one then heard,
They wished for more of truth and womanhood,
Though fearing they cared not what they thought they
wished.

Jean hastened through the street and deserted road
Back to the covert of the placid lake.

Where night had flown out of its unseen caves,
And had settled so softly it touched not the ear;

The breeze was asleep, and the moon shone clear,
And the lake reposed 'neath its playful waves;
It seemed to drive away all fear;
It seemed the soul of the firmament
Was near with flaming passion rent.

The greatest souls, by smallest weaknesses,
Are touched oftentimes, as the old ocean roars
With a wilder tumult than an inland lake
Beneath the angry eye of a clouded heaven.
Little the lake said to him or the night.
Had heaven frowned, and tossed the placid depths
Of the sleeping lake into a seething mass
Of angry foam-torn water, had the earth
Quaked wide with yawning chasms at his feet;
Then nature might have matched his mood and stopped
His bursting heart, and stilled his echoing ear.
Feeling flooded all his tingling being.
His breast would not be hushed; it heaved
As though the throbbing monitor of life
Must burst its prison. He walked and ran
And paced the shore, as a mystic in a trance,
Unknowing what he did. When he awoke,
The morning songsters of the rousing wood
Had caught the promise of the new-born day,
And metamorphosed it to mellifluous song.
Then he sat down in feverish fitful mood,
Thought of the sunny hair and laughing eyes,
Thought of the shattered dream of yesternight,

Tried hard to fit each fragment into its niche;
As though the fractured pieces of a vase
Could all be fitted into a vase again;
Yet Lillian with her many faults, he loved
More than he loved all else within the world.
And when he had it altogether save
One piece, it crumbled in a hopeless heap
About his feet; he could not find the lie,
And when he had found it, could not discover its place,
However much he searched. Of all the tribe
Of lies, the parent is an acted lie,
Its meaning lies beyond the ken and wisdom,
Of honesty.

His rosy romance wrecked!
Commencement week and stinging disappointment.
Standing beneath a gnarled oak, he read
The words of his commencement part, which seemed
Weak, trite, and foolish, cluttered with dead men's
bones.

Strange how the mood oft mars the unborn deed;
When the sun shines within, all things are bright;
But when the storm clouds break, man's staunchest
friend
And strongest resource vanish and are dead.

Then presently his dreams flew far away:
He seemed to see his home across the plains.
The morning hour,—with Bible on his knee,
Plucked open at the grimy thumb-marked page,

His father read aloud his favorite psalm;
And kneeling then with mother side by side,
He heard them raise their morning prayer for him,
That God would keep him safe another week,
And bring him home as good a boy as when
He left for college four long years ago.
They prayed that they might love him just the same,
And that he might return the love they gave;
They thanked their God for all the joys in years
Agone, for health and plenty, and they asked
Indulgence for a few more seasons. He saw
Them at their breakfast, and he heard them plan
How they might please him best, what dainties he
Would most enjoy; the trivialities
A loving mother's mind knows best to gladden
Her only son. He heard a party planned
Of all the neighborhood, for all were happy
That he at last was coming home to live.
He loved them every one, their simple ways,
Their homely virtues and their open hearts;
But he also knew that never again could he
Reclaim the olden place within their hearts;
His disappointed, lonesome folks at home,
A mother's broken heart, a father's wrath.
And then he read again his testament,
A man's worst foes are his own family;
And that a man must say good-bye to these,
Whatever the cost, if duty says to him, go.

And then his dreams rebounded to Lillian
And her charms; would he be strong enough to say
Good-bye to home, to native land, to friends?
At last the lion within him gained control;
And with awakened will and sinewy tread,
He marched with head erect back to his room.
"No more of this," he said, "I am a man;
Duty is first!" And soon his buried head
Was in his book.

III

How slowly commencement week dragged to its close.
Mixed jealousy and fear ofttimes makes years
Of hours, and days of longing minutes; and pride
Holds one in check repeatedly from the right,
From doing what instinctively he craves
And will not rest unless he does; halts him
Until the golden gliding hours are wasted.

Lillian played her game with a high hand, and Jean
Played his; deceit is sure to breed deceit.
How useless 'tis in friendship to attempt
The mastery; time gives the stronger soul
Its rightful place; naught hidden can endure.

Proud Lillian had her escort, and dressed
Always her daintiest; and tried to fling
Herself where Jean would meet her incessantly.
But he made every attempt to shun her encounters;
He walked in unused paths, loitered in his room;
However, his eyes were always on the alert
To catch a glimpse of her. And so the week
Wore old, and the college circle buzzed with gossip;
Though Jean's magnanimous smile was brighter now
Than usual, and he was full of mirth.
His voice was richer, too, than usual.
He passed among his many wondering friends
In such light-hearted, frivolous, courtly manner,
That they thought it was strange, and yet were silenced.

Commencement day at length lagged drearily.
His place upon the program was announced;
The crowd hung breathless on his winged words;
He stood erect, and with his soul afire,
Unloosed the energy of his pained being.
All were surprised, for while Jean always stood
Among the few in everything he tried,
He now had set a standard none could equal.
Congratulations came from every side;
The faculty, that had been watching him,
Now offered him a tempting fellowship
For graduate study abroad, and teeming honor.

And when he asked a time to contemplate,
And told them what he had in mind to do,
They had a thousand cold scholastic proofs
That he was inanely foolish, nor could he
Give a selfish motive for his chosen course.
Strange, he thought, that life must ever ask
The logic for its beetling flights of soul,
When not the slightest reason ever can
Be given for these, however much we search.

And when among the others in the crowd,
Haughty Lillian waited now to touch his hand,
And tell him how she had enjoyed his part;
Though mostly to solicit an invitation
From him, he kept his unseen glance her way,
And noting that she waited till the last,

Quickly excused himself and hurried away,
Leaving her quite crestfallen and perplexed.

That afternoon a daintily tinted note,
Sealed with her kisses, blotted with her tears,
Came to him, simply saying, "Come at seven;
I so much want to see you.—Lillian."

Where is your boasted strength of manhood now?
You who can hold a thousand spellbound minds
Upon your words; who can a listless ear
Turn toward the offer of loudly bellowing fame,
Yet cannot calmly speak with your own soul?
Your brain is all awirl with but one line
From her you love, although you have reasoned hours
Upon the problem, and with faultless forethought
Have concluded that you would never see her more.
Your trunk is packed; the train is due at six.
Why not be strong?—The real strength in men
Is sometimes shown through kneeling unto weakness.
How else are they held to their heritage of clay?

LILLIAN: (alone)

'Tis seven o'clock, but still he does not come.

The dainty form has never looked so perfect,
The little woman never so superb.
The heaving of the lace upon her breast
Bespeaks her eagerness and fear.

LILLIAN:

Will he

Not come?—How wretched barren is life without
The one we love! I have his little verses
Within my bosom: no, 'It matters not,'
It matters not where life may find itself,
In wealth or luxury, society
Or power; if he who should have been with you
Is not, then life has spilled for you its sweet
Aroma, and its dregs will ever float
Upon your cup of joy. It matters not
If perversity and hardship and disdain
Are all your lot; if he is at your side
Who should be there, then life is savory,
And you can sip its golden wine forever.

Strange how our lives develop under trouble;
Wondrous how a week can change a simpering girl
Into the magic mold of womanhood.
But one who reads the inner springs of the mind
Sees many a life that lacks in strength and power,
Simply because no test of pain has ever
Revealed the soul's stronghold unto itself.

Hear the nervous rap upon the door,
And see the maiden with sure feminine skill
Set things at ease. Jean, time would have at least
A parting word with you: Give all for love.
Years stop the current of the mind and heal
Its aching voids; but never so the heart.

JEAN:

I am here tonight but leave tomorrow morn.

LILLIAN:

Oh Jean, you roguish boy, how dare you go
So soon?

JEAN:

What have I here to further wait?

LILLIAN:

Friendship ofttimes holds a man a little hour
And sometimes longer.—I fear your many friends
Have shown you to your stronger self too soon.

JEAN:

Nay Lillian, I have known my quality
Before; this flattery lasts but a day,
And those who lay it thickest, mean the least.
I hope you estimate me as I am;
My head will never lose its poise through praise.

LILLIAN:

Let us talk sense; this flitting night will slip
Before we know it; and we shall be sorry,
If we thus bickering waste it.

JEAN:

Why I came
I know not; life's mysteries are ever new;
We think we catch small glimpses as in dreams,

Though what they mean is ever in a maze.
I had hoped I should not see you any more;
Yet here I am; I cannot tell you why.
But I have brought my little verse again;
The last I hope that I shall ever bring,
For pain is woven through its warp and weft.

A night blooming cereus was brought from afar,
In a costly vase,
That those who knew not its beauty, might see
Its waxen face,
For who can picture this delicate flower,
That blooms in the night but for an hour;
As though the world held not a charm,
But only filled it with alarm;
As though its soul were far too sweet
To endure one breath of life's harsh heat.

And close beside the costly vase,
A sunflower stood,
And shed his broad coarse smile on all,
As a sunflower should,
And the cereus opened her soul in the face
Of the sunflower that bowed with a homely grace;
And never till then had the sunflower seen
The depth of his poverty was so mean;
And when the cereus went to sleep,
The sunflower stood in the midnight deep.

You are the cereus, Lillian, you,
Matchless, serene;
I am the sunflower, Lillian, I,
Common and mean;
Nature has opened your soul in my face,
That your delicate fancies of love I might trace;
Though never might hope to possess such a flower,
Since none save a prince could please you an hour;
But my heart is hushed, it has felt too deep,
And no other flower shall awake it from sleep.

LILLIAN:

But Jean, in this you are unjust to yourself;
You are no sunflower among your fellowmen;
And you likewise have done me as great wrong;
You think me but a worthless simpering girl,
Unfitted for the toil and heat of day.

JEAN:

Yes Lillian, you of airy grace and beauty,
Such as scarce once in life a man may meet;
You were meant for a palace of luxury and ease,
You were meant to live in finery, bedecked
With diamonds, with no other use save just
To captivate. The cereus has no mission
Save beauty; earth may lay no other claims
Upon its life; but of coarse usefulness
The fibers of the sunflower speak; earth binds
Its burdens on the backs of those who can
Endure the heat of the conflict.

LILLIAN:

Still you do

Me wrong. I may be frivolous and weak;
I may not be an Atlas, wearied, sweltering;
I may not feel that God has laid the weight
Of raising heathendom upon my shoulders;
Earth may not claim much of my trivial thought;
But Jean, I can be yet a useful woman,
Whose ministry will sweeten those she loves.

JEAN:

No Lillian, you were meant for a prince's palace;
Life's deeper needs cannot appeal to you;
You were not fashioned to reform the world.

LILLIAN:

I may not be fashioned to be a fabled knight
For a far off losing battle; but still you do
Me wrong. I was not meant to be the toy
Of any man: in all my weakness I
Can help him whom I love, although he choose
To dwell in heathendom.

JEAN:

Nay Lillian, nay;

Love cannot change the personality.
The cereus, howsoever much she loved
The sunflower, could not therefore become a weed.

LILLIAN:

But Jean, you see not this within, nor feel
What I have felt these feverish days; I feel
That I can be whatever the one I love
Shall choose to have me be, if that be noble
And of worth to him.

JEAN:

But feeling, Lillian,
Is so different upon the mountain top
From what it is within the valley and
The shadow, that perhaps you will find at length
Your feeling is no proper guide to follow.

LILLIAN:

What can one follow then? The mountain top,
With all one's better angels, breathing to life
One's higher instincts, surely can no one
Deceive. One may not quite attain those heights;
But life were not worth while, without the striving.

JEAN:

Your unstudied innocence and dreamy eyes
Intoxicate me; who could answer such
An artless image of your nobler self?
Who would dare say it could not be fulfilled?—
But I must go.—The years alone may tell.
We have been thrown together in an hour,

The Knight of the Chinese Dragon.

And are as soon again to drift apart;
Time, the great leveler, has for each of us,
We know not what; but we may hope at least
It has some useful place for us to fill.

She answered his caress, by planting her
Two lips upon his cheek as one might lay,
With tenderest grace, a rosebud on cold marble;
And he went out into the night alone.

IV

MAC:

Come in, Jean.—Are you ill? Why thus so pale?

JEAN:

Mac, one can never know, until he says
Good-bye, quite what it means to part with all
The friends his better self has made.

MAC:

Friend, you mean.

JEAN:

No, I mean friends; royal the fellowship
We have shared these years while I have just begun
To know myself; were all my life forgotten
Save this, I still would be a very king.

MAC:

Do you remember, Jean, when first we met?
I dreamed for hours of two large warm brown eyes,
Enveloped in a face that had not felt
Its native strength.

JEAN:

Mac, you may never know
What you have done for me; I have harbored scarce
A thought you have not shared, since we became
Close friends.

MAC:

God gives us somehow, if we ask,
A few sweet souls to guide and spend ourselves
Upon from day to day; this truly is
The largest opportunity of life.
A man may rear a family, and every
Child may disappoint the ones who gave
It birth; but when a man has made a friend,
Has lived with him, has guided and advised
His course, has shared his deepest life; when one
Has woven his own ideals into his life;
One then may be content, for he has set
Adrift a partial copy of himself,
Has multiplied his life; by the laws of truth
Need never fear the coming destiny of time.
Nothing in life so certain is of stipend
As the investment in one's bosom friends.

JEAN:

God must have meant that you these years should be
My chief confessor; every one must have
Someone with whom to share his deeper self;
One never is quite sure of anything,
Until he has discussed it with a friend.

MAC:

Jean, you know what I think you ought to do?
I know your plans are for the foreign field;
And you will never be content unless

Sometime you go. You have an unrestricted
Personality, which seems to see
And sympathize with all the problems in
The lives of all the men you meet; you love
The truth where'er or in whatever form
You find it. Nearly every man is like
The average violin; one string is rich
In depth of tone, the others lack quality.

Friendship tests the soul as chords the strings;
Each friendship and each chord strikes some new depth,
Shows something at bottom unique; a man is measured
By his hundred friends, exactly as
An instrument is tested by the tones
A hundred different chords bring out of it.
The commonplace instrument is weak and hollow
At many points; likewise, the average man.
One has his narrow, cherished hobby;
Unless he argues every one he meets
Into believing his perverted truths,
He bickering quarrels and snarls; another
Has yellow streaks, and rings untrue to truth;
Another, vanity, and cranes tiptoe,
Ever aspiring to those above his grasp;
Another, steeped in sin; another, out
Of sympathy with life.

But when one has
That magic combination of character,
Which stands four-square to every life he meets;

When one can grasp the hand of every man
And feel for him a brotherly sympathy,
Not a professional, forced charity,
Nor a cant condescending prudish pity;
But in his heart a fellow comradeship
Which treats each man his equal, high or low,
Nor asks of any to subscribe to creed
Nor antique thought, except in broadest terms;
But in whose soul the goodness of the world
Floats without scraping rock or reef of sand,—
When one has such a personality,
Which claims the high respect of rugged men,
Then there is in all the world one fitting work
He ought to thrust himself into a time
At least; the colleges are woefully
In need of men to lead their Christian work;
Such as have soul and sense enough to win
The strongest men. You could do this; you have
In this past year helped win more than a score
Whom every one thought 'twas impossible
Ever to reach.

JEAN:

If I could share my life
As you have shared with me these past four years,
Willingly I would do anything.
You have shown me such possibilities
Of unalloyed unselfishness and true
Devotion to the lives of all your friends,

That it has melted all the harshness, all
The ungenerousness and greed from my weak life.
But I had rather go across the seas;
So few have chosen to go; so many here
May help to bear the load; I want to place
My single life upon the open seas,
Where it will be most servicable to all.

MAC:

This thought appeals to me: Had I gone out
Four years ago, I had gone alone; now two
Are in the field, and four have planned to go,
That I have won. Now when I embark, instead
Of working on lone handed, six at least
Will be upon the foreign shore, because
I tarried these four years. You could do likewise;
Say but the word and you shall have the chance.

JEAN:

I cannot question your sincerity.
My life is such a wonder to me that
I am intoxicated when I look
Into its possibilities: if it
Develops the next ten years at this same pace,
What may it not reveal in truth and goodness?
But I am weak; how dare I undertake
What you suggest? Four years ago, you rocked
My trundle-bed, and taught me first to pray.

MAC:

I hope you ever will keep quite as humble;
Perspective is the test of every life.
One who can see beyond where he has climbed
A score of years or more, will keep his head,
And not grow dizzy at his seeming height;
But one who fancies that the pinnacle
Is beneath his feet, will topple ere he knows.
The weak are ever strong; and those who feel
Their strength, pathetically weak and blind.

JEAN:

Friendship so expands the soul, that life
Without it would be but a starless night.
A friend is like an oasis within
The desert, one may drink and be refreshed
No difference what the labored load he bears
Across the burning sands. Our friendship has
Grown to such sacred depths, that I have tried
To frame in verse what it has meant to me,
Only I know the words are empty sound:

Alone, the ocean of life is uncharted to thought;
Through a chilling fog, the distant harbor is sought;
And life seems scarcely worth the scanty while
It drifts one on, mile after drearier mile,
To death's uncheery port, with trial on trial.

But when my friend and I put out to sea,
I am quite sheltered in his peaceful lee,
And he in mine: whatever the storm may be,
We know a Master Mind has set the sail;
We know a Heart of Love metes out the gale.

MAC:

Jean, this is more than I deserve from you.

JEAN:

We nestle close together beneath the trees,
As two spent birds, with weary pinions furled;
And ponder o'er the problems of our lives,
As twilight isolates us from the world.

You tell me o'er your beads in sacredness,
And one by one your deepest secrets share,
Your frequent failures, your hard-earned success,
Your highest hopes, your constant daily care.

I hear them all from your uncovered heart,
And then begin and tell my beads to you;
The bond of concord that enfolds our lives
Is to our souls a sweet, refreshing dew;

The marvel is, we know and sympathize,
As though each were in turn, the All Good, the All
Wise.

MAC:

True friendship is the sesame of life;
No hidden chamber of soul but opens to it.

JEAN:

Mac, I must go.—There is no word in friendship
To express good-bye, one lives almost
As much with his close friends when far apart
As when together. It is very strange;
I only wonder! Who can formulate,
Who bound his creed? There are vast heights and
depths

That man has never set his foot upon,
From which he has never dropped his line and plummet,
To feel the gravity of God's pervading love;
Heights compared with which, the sweetest breaths
Humanity has drawn out of the abyss
Of heaven, are only faint and flickering gleams
Of God's deep universal love and pain.
We all are children; how can God whisper half
The secrets he may wish to have us share?

I only wonder! Who may set a bound
Upon the all pervading goodness?
I know that creeds must be, have ever been;
The vine that bears its fruit most plenteously
Needs a support, a trellis; likewise a church
Holds up the bleeding body of the Christ.
But if the Lord of our lives were here today,

Were he to see the warring creeds of men,
I fancy that a blush of shame for us
Would fall across his winsome countenance;
I fancy he would stand as once he stood,
Erect with hard-set jaw and blazing eye,
Would call all men to him; would one by one,
Tell them to be at peace, tell them to lay
Aside their egotistic reasoning,
Their faultless logic, wornout toys of time;
Tell them to give their hearts up to the love
That burned his life out in three vigorous years;
Tell them to join their hands and all be one.
Perchance they then might view the world with his
Keen eye, and feel with his knowing heart its needs,
And work its cure with his untiring will,
Living what they profess now to believe,
Forgetting quite the idle mockery
Of a weak race of hero worshipers.

I would not take from any man his creed;
It meets the needs of his weak shivering soul;
It steels his nerves to meet life's certain crises;
It solves for him the riddle of existence;
He could not do without it; but for me,
I only know that God is good and wise;
I only know He leads me ever on
To share his ever growing fellowship.
I only know that no one else can think
Or feel or work for me; I am as free

As the first Adam that lived; the sky is still
Serene, inviting man, the up-looker,
To gaze and feel, to throw aside all veils
That come between his soul and the Unknown.
I only know that every man that thus
Will look, must see the universal dome
Set with the pole star, God, and all things else
Revolving around it; must see the Christ,
His own projection at his loftiest height,
Containing only what is noble and true,
The one solution of his inmost soul,
The highest hope his mind can formulate,
The comprehensive cry of his whole being
Made tangible for his entire life.

Who can form a creed without omitting some?
But God in his broad purpose has a place
For all; the mother who has reared a son,
However base he be, has yet a place

Within her heart of hearts for him;
She oft remembers his sweet innocence
And childish prattle, though long seared in sin;
She ever seeks to woo it back to life.
And so the God who sees us as we are,
Finds very little in the best of us
That He finds not within the very worst.
Give the worst man a normal set of nerves
And a clean page to start anew his record,
And he would set a faultless copy.

Who deserves a crown? Who has his virtue
Unalloyed? The only difference in us all
Is this: Some have looked up, have seen the sun;
And ever afterward all things to them
And measured by the refulgent light of day;
Their eyes are hypnotized by open truth;
And others have looked down into the depths,
Have felt the siren power of greed and sex,
And so infatuated have they grown,
That all of life to them is cast in shadows.

I only wonder! God has somehow given
To us who feed upon the open sunlight
Of his limitless love and goodness, power in friendship
To lift the weakest man in all the world
Up to our levels. It is very strange!
Who can explain the changes we have seen
Around us every day? We have lifted men
These past four years, whom many Christians had
Thrown stones at and had spat upon with lies.
'Tis strange that any man can believe himself
Human and hate his brother; but this is life.
Our friendship has meant much to both of us;
I wish that we might dwell together always.

My lips are parched whenever we are apart,
Remembering the draughts of blood-red wine
Which have flowed from your sweet soul to
strengthen mine;

I have wended lonely over the burning sands
With many a galling burden on my breast,
In hope to find another oasis
Where I might quench my thirst and be at
rest.

I shall return to your clear flowing stream
Some sunny morn; under your dome serene
Shall drink of every pore; and it will seem
That friendship is the sesame of life;
Until then, I shall live far out upon the
heights,
And thrust my soul to clear ethereal flights;
Lest I may prove unworthy your old wine.

(Jean exits)

MAC:

I shall see you in the morning, Jean ———

(Alone musing) The room seems strangely warm and
cheery tonight;

It seems a pervading perfume is in the air.

If I had lived to know but one such evening

As this, then the struggle were worth all it has cost;

For here at last has gone from me a man,

With all the possibilities of life.

I have been but the tug boat that has turned

His ocean liner out toward the deep,
Where it has found at length its element;
And now steams off and leaves me far behind,
Fearful to try the storm tossed waves that it
Dashes its prow into and breaks in foam.

What are degrees and honors? What estates?
Capacity for friendship is the measure
Of a man. Our many colleges may train
Men for diplomas till doomsday; they may teach
Them every fact within the universe;
But unless the will is set in training, too,
Unless they correlate the truths they learn
With their own lives, then they at very best
Are only clever triflers and not men.
The truth has ever been an open book,
Has ever been as free as mountain air,
To those who have engraved it on their hearts,
To those who have imbibed it for themselves,
To those who have known its secret use and power.
But those who boast with artificial lives
And shallow empty souls, may never find it.

When one has felt the pulsebeat of the world,
When one has learned to love the good and true
And beautiful wherever found, when one
Lives constantly in friendship with the best
That he has known, when one is capable
To measure his own soul beside earth's masters,

And to enjoy the fellowship of naked truth;
Then no one need to seek his pedigree,
Enough it is to know he is a man.

He has all things: The sun, the moon, the stars,
The day, the night, the seasons and the years;
Their beauty and their wonder ever are his;
He has his senses open, and has enough
To satisfy their needful wants; he has
A few unselfish friends to minister
His deepest soul unto, and they in turn
Breathe out the sweetest fragrance of their lives
That he may be refreshed; he has his soul
With all its varied longings and unrests,
Its hopes and fears, he has the choicest spirits
Of all the earth revealed in treasured tomes
For his secret springs; he has the Nazerene,
Who out of his unsullied striving soul
Has let him see the God of matchless love,
His father and the father of all things.
He has as much as any man has had,
Except in quantity, perhaps, for he
Is dealing with realities; life to him
Is not a game of chance in any sense.

He travels on as one who bears a cup
Filled to the brim with the choicest wine of time.
Only one cup is given his hands to carry,
Hence his care; if he stumble, some is spilled,

If he fall, the whole is lost; the cup is shattered.
The God who filled the cup for him, prepared
The thirsty souls to drink and be refreshed;
And he must carry it whatever the cost.
He learns the only lessons life may teach
Its favored few, who dwell upon the heights:
Unselfish friendship with his fellowmen,
And friendship with his God, in all his ways.

V

They all were there: the old, the young, the rich,
The poor, the high, the low; no one was missing.
The country atmosphere is free from caste;
All dwell beneath the boundless dome of the sky
In sympathy with every living thing,
Or brute or plant or man. They all had come
To help the parents welcome Jean's return.

Jean went among them as in olden time
The gods were wont to walk the earth among men;
The ruddy glow of youth was on his cheek,
And there flowed out of him a subtle power
Of personality, as fragrant and free
As perfume from the lilac in the early
Spring. Unconsciously he stood erect,
With features sharp as though they had been hewn
From flawless marble; view him as you would,
He was a man, in head and heart and hand,
Blended and unified; his soul had chiseled
Its certain marks all over him; so thin
The mantle of his body seemed, that one
Could almost turn the leaves as of a book,
And read the inmost diary of each
Day's thought and life. To see him did one good;
And but to know him was a constant tonic.

He went among them freely, greeting them,
Enquiring how they were; his sympathy

Went out to all, and his unbounded kindness
Cast a fragrance whitherso'e'er it fell.
He keenly read the change in all he met;
Sometimes he bubbled over with mirth and joy;
Sometimes he sighed with pain and disappointment;
Always he showed unbounded sympathy.

He met his old companions of the past,
The boys who had known him as a boisterous boy.
He anxiously had watched to catch a glimpse
Of his old comrade of the early days,
The companion with whom he had shared everything,
Both good and bad. A half a dozen years
Had intervened; he had served in the Navy
For four years, and Jean was wondering
What time had wrought; and suddenly he saw;
They stood, face piercing face, and Jean was sick:
He read the marks of sin at a swift glance.
He took his old companion by the hand,
And called him the old name in the old way;
The other looked out of the blood-shot corner
Of his muddy eye, and said with half a sneer,
"Yes, I've been seeing things;" and Jean well knew
What things he meant, nor cared to ask their names.
He tried as best he could to recall a scene
Of olden times, of childhood merriment,
When they were boys with common interests
And common joys; but the old comrade was
Not there; he had been lost far out at sea,

And this was only his bruised skeleton
That had come back, a bundle of polluted
Clay. Jean tried in every way to waken
Some common feeling, but in vain: if one
Looks long into the blazing sun, his eyes
Can nevermore adjust themselves to day;
And if one plays with fire, his soul is parched.
At length the evening wore away, and Jean
Was in his chamber.

JEAN: (musing)

Can it be true? Can half
A dozen years bring such a change of life?
My curiosity at last is still;
I see that everything has its own price;
I find my old companions, most of them,
Stricken for life, the fearful cost of sin.
My contemplation has often said, some things
Are not recorded; but I read tonight
The not uncertain record of the past;
Nothing escapes the piercing eye of time.

Time is a curious builder, and very few
Can read its strokes aright; it is unjust
To many, and to some is quite too good.
I have had every opportunity in life
And the old comrade of my boyhood days,
Has seen enough of hell to smudge an angel.
Perhaps I now am faultier than he, if all

Were known; had he been in my place, and I
In his, who knows, he might be better now
Than I, and I far worse than he. I know
I could bring back to life his better self
If I could live with him as once we lived;
But he is gone, and I may never see
Him more,—gone on another random journey
Seeing things.

Deep down within my soul I hear
A voice that says: Perchance in some fair clime,
In some far distant future now unknown,
He will receive a better chance than I;
If justice is at last to balance things.
This but an echo; still I feel somehow
That my coarse sympathy cannot exceed
The greater depths of God's unfathomed love.
All that the present holds is this: All things
In nature are profuse in fruit-bearing;
One acorn in a million seems destined
To become an oak; one child a century
Reveals the estate of man. My littleness
I see tonight as I have never seen.
Time mocks us all; it has gone on before
One came; and it will glide as noiselessly,
And men will go about their business just
The same, when one is gone; pride is the placard
Of a stunted soul; tonight, I have seen
More affectation than should fill the world,

Man's elemental impulse seems to be
The ego. Few outgrow it; everywhere
Men hide behind some selfish petty pride,
When, if they knew, there is scarce a man alive
In all the world that cannot do something
Of worth, that their weak hands could not attempt.

But all has not been worthless dross tonight.
There is in common people so much worth,
Such unalloyed content and happiness,
Such heavy burdens borne unconsciously,
Such satisfaction with their meager lot,
Such inspiration in their daily life,
Such trustfulness in all their fellowmen,
That any king might covet them with pride.
It is a tonic to the soul to be
At home again; there is a sympathy
That nowhere else is known or even guessed.
One's life is as an open book to all;
For everyone and everything is woven
Into its history, in every line.
The old things after all appeal to one.

He lay him down, and as he fell asleep,
These thoughts kept slowly running through his mind:

There is no place like the old place,
The place where one is born,
Where early in the morning
He meets life's ruddy dawn,
Where first his brown eyes open
In wonder and in glee
As he comes slowly drifting
Out of eternity,—

There is no place like the old place.

There are no friends like the old friends,
The friends of the bygone days,
The friends from early childhood
In all life's varied ways,
The friends who wear the glamour
Of youthful beckonings,
Yet satisfy the testings
Maturer manhood brings,—

There are no friends like the old friends.

VI

And so they loitered out across the fields,
The father and the son; they wended over
The meadowland; they waded through the rye;
The cornfield flung its banners in their faces.
The father's thoughts were ever on his farm;
How here a fence might be removed, and two
Fields thrown together; how the crops might be
Rotated to advantage; how a thousand
Varied changes might be wrought. They crossed
Into the timberland, and talked of when
It would be best to sell; they stopped among
The cattle, sheep, and hogs, selecting some,
And culling others to keep another year.

Then the father proudly led the son
Among the horses, told him to select
Whichever one he wanted for his own.
Jean's eye fell soon upon the best of the herd.
The father, jesting, told him he had chosen
The one most worthless in all the lot; he was
Surprised a boy so soon from college should
Be found so very dull in matters so
Important. Then Jean went into the points
Of conformation that were evident:
The symmetry of lines, the bone, the muscle,
The temper, and the eye; whereupon the father
Roared with laughter, told the son that this

Was the very colt that he had bought for him.
And thus they walked and talked from field to field.

The old man's eye was on the crops and stock;
But Jean was dreamy; memory had unloosed
The golden cord that bound him to the past.
The olden Jean with his ambitions came
And went, as chill and heat displace each other
In a fevered brain. And last of all
They came down to the brook, and clambered up
The hill that overlooked the rolling farm.
Here it was that Jean's new house and barn
Were to be builded. The old man explained
The various details as he had thought them out:
Here was the site for the bank barn, and here
The house, and there the garden, there the well,
And yonder the orchard. Thus they sat down and faced
The setting sun, and looked across the fields,—
A feast for any eye. Somehow this strain
Whispering and coaxing came to him o'er and o'er:

I've an empty bower on yonder hill,
With windows wide and door ajar,
Awaiting a songster from afar;
It is furnished fit for any queen;
About it the flowers play hide and seek
As they trip the loitering laughing breeze,
Which scampers among the fruit-laden trees;
At the foot of the hill, a brook with its song
Goes threading the grain-laden fields along.

JEAN:

Father, I have wondered many times
What your aged father said when you went out
To fight for the old flag we love so much;
I wonder what your mother did the night
Before you left, and at the morning meal?

And then the old man's nerves grew tense, his eyes
Assumed their youthful luster, and a thrill
Shot through his being as the warrior said:

FATHER:

Jean, those were stirring times! The land was all
Aflame! The flag had been insulted, and
The bugle, the drum and fife, made the blood boil.
But it was sad, for every fireside mourned
Its vacant chair; and many, more than one.
And as the news came northward, telling of the rage
Of the bitterest warfare, its killed and missing, many
A mother's son, 'twas learned, had bit the dust.

JEAN:

But Father, what did your old father say,
And your old mother?

The warrior's eyes
Grew dim, as through the mists of fifty years,
He raised the curtain on a sacred scene,
His lips would not disclose; but this is what
The dream of fifty years brought back to him:

He had enlisted, had come home at night
Unheard, had stolen to his attic chamber,
Had selected a few of his most cherished treasures,
Had tiptoed to his mother's side; had pressed
A silent kiss on her half-parted lips.
A moonbeam lay across her pale white face;
For she was dreaming in the silent night
That the death angel crossed her threshold, took
Her only son and left her sad and lone.
He placed a meagre note beside his plate,
Upon the table, bearing but these words,
'A Volunteer'; then ate some bread and meat,
And started through the dreary chilly night
Ten miles whither the train set South at dawn.
And just before the engine hove in sight,
A foam-flecked steed came dashing down the street,
And an old man, with locks of gray, and stooped
Form, rode up to shake him by the hand,
To wish him well and place within his grasp
His mother's testament. This Jean well knew,
Although he had heard it only once; it was
A tale his father scarcely ever told,
And then in tears.

JEAN:

I am cruel, Father, now
To recall to memory this scene you sketched
For Mother once when I was but a lad;
But did your parents think you very foolish?

FATHER:

No,
Whatever was the pain they felt, their hearts
Were proud, they had a son who dared his life
To save their country's flag, for they had come
Across the billowy deep to found a home
Within the land of freedom.

JEAN:

Were you sad
That you must go?

FATHER:

I was not forced to go!
I was a Volunteer! 'We're coming, Father Abraham,
Six hundred thousand strong,' we proudly sang
As we marched forth; we gladly went; who would
Hold back in such a time as that? None but
A coward! Old as I am, I would go today,
If there were such a need as there was then!

JEAN:

Would you be glad, were I to volunteer,
If I saw such a need?

FATHER:

There is no need
Today such as there was in Sixty-One,
My boy.

JEAN:

Yes, Father, greater need than then,
If such a thing could be; men everywhere
Are needed in the growing cause of truth
And righteousness, for when one thinks how long
The world has lain in ignorance and sin;
Thinks of the countless million souls now dead
That never had the chance to rightly live;
Thinks that a life goes out with each pulse beat
That has not seen the light of freedom,
Nor has known what 'tis to really truly live;
When one thinks of the great abuse of those
In power upon the weaker ones they rule,
Of all the tyranny and wretchedness
And ignorance; is it not quite sufficient
Cause to make the blood boil? When one thinks
That these poor wretched creatures, born and reared
In deepest heathendom, have no way of
Escape, no money to transport themselves
Into a land of freedom, is not one
Obliged to take enlightenment to them?

FATHER:

But Jean, one does not need to go so far;
Help is needed at our very doorstep;
Our own community is woefully
In want of many things; this you well know.
You who have gone and feasted on the fruits
Of learning, ought now to come back to us

And share the many truths that you have gathered.
The noblest crop of all these wealthy farms

Is their young men and women; we have long
Talked of the happy times when you would return
And settle on the hill to live for us.
Our wealth is quite sufficient; we could run
A model farm, and you could, if you wish,
Become a lecturer to farmers, you
Could teach them how to raise far better crops,
You could inspire their children, and thus do
Great good. I have long seen this needy field.
Had I been sent to college, I could now
Do what we are expecting you to accomplish.
I have planned that my own limitations should
Not fall on you; I have waited all these years
Your life career; my sole ambition has
Been set on this.

JEAN:

But Father, if you knew
A need some fifty times as great as this
That you could fill, would you not try to do it?

FATHER:

I do not know of such a need; in fact,
I do not think such a need exists.

JEAN:

 If you
Saw here two houses in the neighborhood
Afire; and there were fifty men at work
Upon the one, and only one lone man
Upon the other, would you long debate
Where you were needed the more? Look if you will:
Sin is everywhere; here we have fifty
Men at work extinguishing the flames
It kindles; only one at work within
The lands of heathendom; and here so many
More are willing to lay down their lives
Than there. Can one then seriously question where
The need is greater?

FATHER:

 You do not mean that you
Intend to go! Why boy, you could upon
These acres raise enough to send each year
A score of men.

JEAN:

 What if the score of men
Could not be found? Besides, each man has his
Own obligations to perform; one can
Not shift responsibility; I am
A Volunteer, enlisted under the banner
Of the spotless Prince of Peace; and hope some day,
. If God permit, to go where the need is greatest.

When one has harbored long a noble thought,
Has felt the perfumed breezes wafted fresh
From the Creator's rosary, can he hope
To seal the eastern doorway of his soul
Which admits the ruddy breath of Aurora?

FATHER:

I did not send you away to college to learn
Such nonsense. Jean, you are a likely lad
And I am disappointed woefully
In you.

JEAN:

Indeed, I am sorry, Father,
For you taught me first to pray, Our Father;
And that means not our own family alone,
Nor our own state, nor nation; but our world.
If God is father of us all, then we
Are brothers all; and he expects that we
Who have been fortunate, must lend a hand
To those who are unfortunate; how else
May the world be won to righteousness?—You had
Not been more disappointed in me had
I disobeyed your teaching, and come back
To you a wasted profligate, I fear.

FATHER:

You must be crazy; and few maladies
Are worse than that; for one might be reclaimed

Were he in his right mind, though prodigal;
But when the mind has lost its rightful function,
When reason totters, then what is there left?

And thus the old man silently withdrew;
And Jean lay rapt in fancy, setting visions
Afloat, as when a wild canary alights
Upon a thistle stem, and one by one
Loosens the airy dreamy downs upon
The breeze, robbing each of its rightful burden.
And thus the twilight fell: his eyes were very
Misty, seeing but the soul of things.

He heard a child's clear voice beside the brook,
And looking up saw three lithe forms approach,
A woman with a little boy and girl.
Could he be dreaming? Were these not his Lillian,
And little Lillian and little Jean?
The forms came nearer, passing on the road.
The roguish childish laughter flamed his breast.
And when he heard the smoothest silvery voice
Call out, 'Here Jean and Miriam!' he arose
And took two hasty steps before he awoke.
The woman saw him through the gathering darkness,
And quickly vanished down the winding road.
These were his distant cousin Miriam,
Her little niece and nephew; one was named
For her and one for him; and thus he thought
He heard the names he had dreamed. Strange what a
life

We lead; here two and two does not always
Make four; few of us know our alphabet;
None of us may spell l-i-f-e.

JEAN: (musing)

Was I but dreaming?

Our senses work strange fantasies sometimes.
Man is a queer compound of good and best,
Of bad and worst, of God and man, of strength
And weakness, of wealth and poverty, of soul
And body. Many depths are struck in times
Of stress and strain that we have never perceived.
One can know at most the tiniest bit
Of all the pentup possibilities
And latent thoughts and feelings of his soul.
The deeper one delves, the more he sees the vast
Infinity there is within his being,
Only a fragment of it realized;
Though ever awaiting for some mystic key
To open its sealed vault. What is truth to one
May seem to others roaring idiocy;
Each has his hobby which, to those who have
Not thought so carefully, seems fanciful
And lacking sense. Thus it has ever been;
Young men catch glimpses of new visions;
Then leave their fathers dreaming olden dreams.

And so the twilight deepened into night.
Little the young man possesses who leaves home

And closest friends against their strongest wishes,
Who goes out in quest of naked truth and love
In hope to do his fellowmen great good;
Little he has save conscience, when the storm
Of conflict breaks hardest over his feeble frame.
And thus with night came loneliness.

JEAN: (musing)

What have
I left? My dearest friends are gone; they think
I am beside myself; home, country, friends,
The dearest words one's language knows, burn now
My tongue; I am as lonely as a lighthouse
Built on a rock, far out at sea.
And yet I have the stars! They as of old
Shed peace serene out of their silent depths.
When the first man looked up, he saw the same
Rich galaxy swing through their orbs; stable
They move eternally; nothing disturbs
Them in their established course.

Standing erect,
With hat in hand, looking into the depths
Of the infinitude of heaven, he breathed
These words:

“ ‘When I consider the heavens, the moon and the
stars;

What is man, that thou art mindful of him?’

Whatever else may come or go,

I have the stars!’”

And then the wind began
To blow; and all the heavens were black with anger;
The stars were gone, and he was left alone.
Falling upon his face in utter anguish,
Bitterly he wailed and long, with none to hear.
Presently his suffering ceased; and as serene
As look the heavens, when after storm and rain
They open in perfect calm, and bear no trace
Of whither the path of the pitiless storm last passed;
So he felt the towering serenity that comes
When first the thought of God's all-loving care
And close companionship conquers the soul.

JEAN: (musing)

I have the Nazerene and his near God,
Who loves me more than I can love myself;
Who placed me in His world and guides me now;
For whatsoever the pain and wheresoever
The battle, He will lead me on; let the
Storm rage, I have my God, I am at peace.

VII

Surprises come when one foresees them least,
Sometimes unclouded and sometimes fathomless.
Jean reached the house, expecting all abed;
But when he saw the lamplight streaming through
The door, he hardly knew whether to face
The raging elements, or the harsh words
His father would shower on him and the tears
And overpowering love his mother would
Pour out of her good heart to change his plans;
But when he entered, everything was cheer.

His cousin, third removed, his distant cousin,
Miriam, wreathed in smiles, set things at ease
By telling how she had mistook him when
She passed him on the hill, and of the fright
She had received; and then all burst into
A round of laughter. Miriam had prepared
A plate of comfits; and Jean partook of this
And started spinning tales of college ghosts
And goblins, and of numberless pranks and scares,
Forgetting it was now past midnight. Then
The father merrily began to rob
The graves of fifty years ago of the army
Anecdotes and all the wild adventure
Of a soldier's life. The mother, too, rehearsed
In serious silvery voice, reports within
The neighborhood within her memory.

And buoyant Miriam, not to be outdone,
The climax capped with roguish studied glee.
Reaching the weird uncanny end of the tale
She told, suddenly clutching Jean by the arm,
She gave such an unearthly, fiendish shriek
That he came near collapsing. Then they laughed
Till tears rolled down the mother's cheeks, and he
Was quite undone. And thus they parted for
The night.

Jean found himself at length alone
Within his chamber, pondering, sorely perplexed,
Upon the part his father played; for he,
Jean knew, was only feigning, though he acted
His part with the fortitude of a brave soldier.
He had preserved this one last night of home;
For never again, if once the mother knew,
Could she be cheerful for the briefest hour.
And he felt proud of the part his father played,
That they might take one short hour's glimpse of bliss
Before the chilling blasts of disappointment
Came. And he lay down to sleep with queer
Conflicting wavering thoughts, as sleep the brave
Upon the burned and barren battlefield,
After a hard day's fight, ready to march
When the bugle sounded; for he knew not what hour
His mother might come to him in the night.
He lay, as in mid ocean, tempest tossed,
Not knowing if he would survive the pain;
Too sick to care, restless recounting his life.

In times of trouble when a helpless man
Leafs through the pictured dream of memory,
And one by one studies his changing rôles,
And notes the grotesque figures of himself
Set up in a series, tapering to the point
Of vanishing, he but discovers he
Is frail and changeful, that the misconceptions
In the one, vary a trifle in the next,
But slightly in the third, and thus through the many
And varied alterations of himself;
While on the surface all seem different,
Yet underneath, all are the very same.
As a kaleidoscope shifts into figures
Of endless deviation, mirroring
Countless varieties of form one hardly
Understands, with but a few small fragments;
So in life, the Maker uses but a handful
Of the pebbles from his spacious seashore of thought
In molding man; and yet reflected in
His vast creation, countless are the forms
Man sees his mind thrown in continually.

JEAN:

Can I be sure this is no dream within
A dream? Can I be certain another year
Will not confound this seeming pressing duty?

He dashed it over and over, sleepless and fevered;
The door came open slowly, and he feigned

He slept. A trailing gown of white crept down
Beside his pillow, and with soft caress,
She placed the tenderest kiss a mother's lips
Could press upon the brow of her loved son;
Then disappearing in the darkness as softly
As she had come, it seemed an angel's smile
Had fallen upon him and had hushed his fears.
Repose came to him as to a small child
That lies secure upon its mother's breast,
Knowing that naught within the world can harm,
Caring for nothing half so much as love.

Jean guessed quite wrongly of his father's part;
For this is what transpired while he alone
Upon the hill sat fighting his soul's battles.
The father brought the news directly home,
And laid it in the mother's ear; and then
Together, they sat down to plan a course
That would defeat his purpose; when upon
The scene, bounded their cousin Miriam,
Unheralded, buoyant and glad, a woman
Of such light heart, such wholesome wilful ways,
And surmounting unconquered spirit and buxom health,
That everyone was cheered wherever she went.
They said they feared that Jean had lost his mind,
For he would never think of leaving home
Were he the son that they had sent away.
After they had reached the end, she uttered
Unconsciously a hearty laugh; and then

With all the seriousness she could command
Simply proclaimed that she would change his plans.
And there was such assurance in her tones
They were convinced she could win any one.

Soon they decided that constant cheerfulness
Must rout their son, for they had never moved
His mind in anything through argument.
Too well they knew the one weak spot to strike
Was at his heart; wherefore they planned their attack.
Miriam was in command with glittering sword
Of laughter, and with breastplate of good cheer.
Not a harsh sound nor a sad note was to
Be sounded anywhere; love was her guide,
And all the instincts of her womankind
At her command. Through many years she had been
His constant playmate; her home and his were on
Adjoining farms; an only child was she;
And she had just returned from college, too.
The parents long had wished that she and Jean
Would wed and build their home upon the hill.
Thus begins another struggle for Jean,
In which defeat for the first time must come
To whosoever loses.

When morning dawned,
Jean wakened with a start, dreaming his mother
Lamented loudly her woe; listening, he heard
The laughter of two women. True it is,
There are few chasms a woman will not leap

For one she loves. Jean quickly concluded
His mother had not heard; another day
Remained to pleasure; he would try to fill
It full to overflowing, ere it closed.
Little he guessed that others also planned;
Though Miriam had each hour crowded with joy.

The history of these swift fleeting days
Were tedious indeed if given in full,
For there were parties planned, excursions, drives,
Outings of every sort, and special guests.
Jean lived them through expecting every hour
Surely would be the last; pondering
Over the whole of his uncertain life.
The goodness that was showered upon him would
Have melted to wax the heart of any man
However coarse or hard it might have been.

Miriam, who had always seemed his sister,
Now assumed a different sphere; resourceful
She was, and her advances modest and
Discreet, were next to irresistible.
Jean tried to tell her that she only held
The place of sister; but she grew each day
The sweeter and more tender, till he saw
No power on earth or heaven could stay her mind.
And so exceeding artless seemed her manner
That he was next to powerless; circumstances
Lent her success; he knew that she would tell
His mother were he to relate his plans.

Thus fretful days grew into longing weeks;
He felt the olden youthful allurements return,
For he was being trapped within a net,
As is a fly that tangles its weak wings
Within the silken web of a subtle spider.
The old ambitions flung their gaudy banners
In his face: the hill was silently waiting;
Miriam, his cousin, grew; and Lillian,
With sunny hair and laughing eyes, faded,
And decreased in her ardor; she was becoming
But a mocking dream; his mother silently helping
His cousin Miriam to win his love;
His father, anxious, upon the waiting hill
To build his house, the call of selfishness,
To health and plenty, the call of pleasure,
The call of home, of friends, of native land;
And Miriam ardently spurring him on.

And so

Day after day, reluctantly he said,
Tomorrow; and thus that weakest of weak words,
The time that never comes, held him in check.
But Miriam ever filled the present, today,
The time that is, and carried well her part.
Within his breast the roots of love were taking
Hold, though he was all reserve; and she
Went far as tactful woman knew she dared,
With charming sibyl sighs and sparkling glances,

With fond caresses that were not too bold;
And ever with something new and something striking.

The wild and wilful tosses of her head
And her roguish laughter, left upon his eye
Their mark; and Jean began vaguely to dream
His wedding was announced with cousin Miriam;
His other sunny featured dream was fading
Into night, his distant Lillian
Was losing all her charms. The cousin watched
Each slightest move; and noticed he was yielding,
Then she plied her every art. And once
She won: ardently he kissed her lips,
Which she resented with such instant warmth
Of womanly instinct and such artlessness,
That he was quite enamored.

When that evening,
Miriam told the mother her success,
That she was sure to conquer, that slowly she
Was gaining ground; her face was wildly aglow,
For she had chafed with all the eagerness
Of a physician over a dying man,
In the hope of marking symptoms of a change.

These had been cruel days for the good mother,
Days full of anxious longing for her son.
The cheerfulness, though all assumed, had helped
To lift the burden somewhat; however, it
Was heavy to bear; and Jean, if he had studied

Closely, might have seen the change; but he
Had such unbounded faith in his old mother,
He had not questioned her.

For the following day,
There was planned for him and Miriam, drive
Far through the country to a lonely lake,
A picnic dinner, a return at night.
She felt the day of days for her had come;
All would be settled ere the trip was ended.
The sun was lighting up the morning splendors
When she awoke. All spoke of love: the birds
Among the trees, the bleating of the lambs,
The lowing of the cattle on the hills,
The waking light of morn with its hundred hopes.
Never the day had broken more serene
Nor full of hope for her; her fluffiest gown
But veiled her faultless form; she was aglow
In every fiber of her perfect being.
Sacred to her was love, although she labored
Hard to win it; pure her heart, though set
With hasty frivolous ways. This seemed to her
The nick of time, and she had never felt
In happier buoyant mood, nor been more certain
Of easy success.

They started on their journey
Merrily. Miriam was at her best;
But Jean was nervous, weighing hidden thoughts,
And painting pictures, though above it all
Miriam kept him cheerful. Who can tell

What one day will bring forth? The clearest sky
Is oft beset with storm and gale when least
Expected; one small gram oft turns the balance;
So one thought or slight event may shift the course
Of a life. Miriam watched the wavering balance
Of his mind, and wherefore threw her vigorous self
Wholehearted against his citadel.

They met

A messenger upon the way, who handed
Jean a telegram. She knew its meaning,
And consternation filled her breast, for she
Had never seen him look so ashy pallid

Nor so intense. It seemed his mind had gone
Upon a long and distant journey alone;
He ceased to breathe and Miriam thought him dying.
Throwing her arms hurriedly about his neck,
She kissed the paleness from his brow, and left
A tear upon his cheek. His color came
And went; and smiling quite confusedly,
He slowly passed the telegram to her.
She read: 'The call has come. A letter follows.'

As when the lightning breaks at silent midnight,
And illumines an instant every separate object
Under heaven; so truths break on us sometimes
Unawares, and set our brains afire. Her doom
She saw that instant, and he felt her thought;
Though knew not how she understood the meaning.

Confused he pondered; and Miriam was mirthless,
The rosebud in her cheek had turned a lily;
And she sat likewise dreaming over again
The olden dreams, fearful to fathom the future.
An hour ago, the past held not a charm,
All hope was on the rainbow dreams to come.
Strange when in trouble, we retreat within
The harbor of the past; but when hope beckons,
We are ever out upon the open sea,
Looking in faith for some far distant port.

JEAN:

When knew you first I was a Volunteer?

MIRIAM:

The evening you told your father.

JEAN:

And Mother?

MIRIAM:

She was the first to bear the news to me.

VIII

There is a limit to the strength of any will;
The oak is shattered by too strong a blast;
And earth, it seems, has ever thrown its storms
Most stinging against its staunchest souls, and not
A few have crashed in ruin beneath the strain.

Why bring to life a day so rich in promise
In its morning hour, and yet so black
With storm ere yet the sun had half way reached
The zenith of the sky? Why lift the curtain
On a scene that drags with nothingness
To its drawn tedious close? One thing alone
The day holds for us, a promise Miriam would
Not tell the parents of the telegram.

The next day came and went as one may turn
The blank page of a book between two chapters.
The third day brought the tardy letter Jean
Had waited now for half a hundred hours,
Each hour a year in his expectancy.

For Miriam, each separate minute was crowded;
Every scheme her brain could plan was marshalled
For the final trial of the conflict; win or die,
She said within her soul: there is no chasm
A woman will not leap for one she loves.

Jean read his letter without any sign;
Though deep within a silent voice said, Go.
God gives to every man, if he will heed
Its call, a voice within, a pilot,
A guiding angel to lead him over the sands
And shoals of life, that no power under heaven
Can turn aside or strangle out of him.
The letter said to come at once; and Jean
Had answered, yes, to some deep-seated cry,
But on his face it left not any trace,
For he put on his jauntiest air, and spent
The day as one may counterfeit his last
Hour with his dearest friends in merriest mirth.

But Miriam saw and knew the part he played;
And she kept saying over within herself,
I will win or die; the lion within her heart
Knew no defeat. And thus the day wore old;
And this is what she scheming planned against Jean:
She would lead him afield, under the spell of the moon,
With every known wile of a woman's being
Would lure his passion beyond the clutch of his will,
Would set the day of the marriage; thus she sought
To crush the man she thought she truly loved.
When friendship walks along, hand clasped in hand
With love, the chiming melodies of earth

Resound their twin-born footsteps; but alone
Love oft-times strikes the harshest discord known.

And while she thus was plotting, all unknown,
Jean wandered unaccompanied across the fields;
And sitting down beside the pensive brook,
He wrote his diary of his past life:

Our days crash by, like waves upon the beach,
The rhythmic pulsebeats of our restless lives.
Each brings its mystic mellowed secrets forth
Out of the bosom of the unfathomed deep,
And lays them like bright shells upon the shore.
And we, as boisterous wondering children, leap
In hope to find the pearl of untold worth,
As spent, the water leaves the glistening sands.

Our life is liquid, ever restless on
And ever on it takes its endless way.
'Tis born far up the mountain's starry summit,
And trickles down as pure as liquid dew,
Distilled from lily bells and caught on sands
Of diamonds. It leaps and laughs, and pours
Its glad wild life in ripply cheer and song,
Tipping the trailing ivy and the sturdy oak
Alike to life. Over cataracts it leaps
To rainbow-shaded pools, where song birds bathe

And carnivora noiseless slake their scorching thirst.
In discontent, it loses now itself
In tangled woods, overtopped with spreading boughs,
Hedged in by tractless wastes of foliage.
For many miles its silvery thread is lost
Save to the lonely flower and wilderness.
Yet, gathering up the moisture of a thousand hills,
It proclaims itself at length across the plains,
Catching the murmuring voice of brow-creased toil,
Standing aloof, yet still flowing along
In noiseless majesty and powerful sweep,
Watering all the countless lowing herds
Of clover-scented cattle from the hills,
Carrying on its bosom many lives,
Floating the commerce of a busy world,
Sharing its life with all who come its way,
As on and on and ever on again
It restless sweeps to meet the embracing ocean,
To lose itself within the cooling depths.

As one who comes down to his favorite brook
Each day to glance upon its glassy depths,
To pick a pebble here, a rose leaf there,
In silent meditation; so I come
Now at the old life's close, where many times
I have loitering spent an hour in quiet shade,

Each day a different stream, yet ever the same,
And open the last time the diary
Of my past life and leaf it slowly through,
To bathe the blurred page in a tender tear,
To laugh in childish freedom over the joy,
To catch the motive, to glean out the gold.

Here on the fly leaf is a pregnant prayer,
Too sacred to repeat to common ears,
Too poorly lived to more than mention, still
The bulwark and the strength of the spent past.
I pity him who has no prayer; his life
Is rudderless; it drifts and leaps, is lost,
And never brings its cargo into port.

Here is set down a failure; read between
The lines: Who has no failure to record,
Lives on the lowest level; he who sees
No blot where he at times pours out his tears,
Is nothing better than a babbling brute.

Here stands success, in bold and careless scrawl;
Success, that wide-mouthed, much sought, dangerous
word;

The thought that tingles every smallest vein,
That ofttimes sells us from our better selves;

The deed that is the paragon of gods.
Yet he who never writes that word, knows not
The feathery footsteps of the thought that soars,
By wild imagination spurred and whipped,
To an ideal in highest ether, set
In matchless diadems of untold worth.
And he who never flies ahead of time,
Upon the wings of thought, to that high mount
Where dwell the truly great, never half knows
The witchery of that which beckons all
Before they draw themselves up in their might
To the summit, clothed with honor and true greatness.

And here in shaded silence stands a sin;
The page is blurred, the leaf is torn and smudged
With much of misery and secret sorrow.
Sin is such a blight; could one be free
From all that worries, wastes him and distracts,
From all that draws him out of perfect poise,
The world would wondering lay its tributes all
Low at his feet; he would be a faultless god.
Temptation has its use; it keeps one humble;
The tree is strengthened, flinging back the blasts;
The fungus grows in one brief night beneath
A rift of roses, drinking in the dew,
Naught to disturb it; but the sun awakens,

And it is withered in as short an hour
As it was born: all that exists resists.
Give me a firmer root, a stronger bole,
O oak, to fight back to the billowy bottom
Of the pit, the varied temptations around
Me flung; I seek no easy virtues.

Here on a page, the best of all the book,
Is told a secret tale no one has shared,
A good deed done to one in sorest need,
A life plucked from the clutch of sin and death.
He who turns o'er the pages of his life
And finds no good deed there, were better dead;
From memory, the storehouse of our acts,
Holds nothing but what is best; the wrong it gilds
With fancy, till footsore it weary toils
To tinge the wrong with right, to shield the truth
Until the conscience lies a blasted ruin.
Each worthy deed of good has but one root,
But many branches, where are hung bright torches
For the lives of countless blinded men,
Who groping otherwise would lose their way;
But seeing these, the path is plain and light.
And he who does the deed is doubly blest;
His dreams are pleasant, set with radiant stars;
His days go in continual melody;

Nothing distracts him: labor's glowing seal
Is on his features, and a sunny smile
That shrivels all the baseness that it meets,
Is on his face; where good is done, joy reigns.

As when a painter comes at end of years
Down from his studio, unsatisfied
With his poor daubings, for unhurried hours
To view the master minds of all the years,
Spread through the treasured galleries of art,
To tune his senses to a higher thought
And to a nobler aim; so I have left
Behind the cares for this untroubled time
To catch a sincerer smile, more winsome ways.

As now I grasp the clean unlettered book
Of the new life fresh from the hand of time,
What shall I write across its title page?
A thousand tempting headings arise to view:
Wealth, power, fame, learning, selfishness, and greed,
And many more; but someone seems to stand
And peer in eagerness at what I write;
I hear a low voice pleading whisper, set down
These words: For love of God and man.
And so half blurred with ecstasy and tears,
Well knowing I can only hope to reach

A little way into their unknown height,
I humbly scrawl them out across the page,
And my life's diary is hid away
In my heart's secret chamber, as I go
To mingle in the crush and grind of life.

The evening came, and with it Miriam
Unloosed her luring net of frenzied passion.
Into the moonshine centuries unceasing,
Have dazed lovers wandered, babbling vows
Of unpremeditated destiny,
Born of Aphrodite and raptured Venus.
They wandered arm in arm, Miriam leading,
Sighing her hopes of unconstrained love.
The mazy world of silvery enchantment
Beckoned their senses afar to the pointed stars:
The blue-eyed myrtle, the red-lipped rose, the poppy
Golden-crowned, wove their spell upon the heart.
The whispering spirits among the trees breathed love,
The dancing fairies of the fields sparkled
With passion overwrought, the naiades
Of the brook babbled a liquid litany
Learned from a warmer and more lofty planet.

Let virtue be praised for this: if one has lived
His best in calm and secret when no eye

Was near, if one has plodded on through weary
Hours when dull monotony said, do
The thing he should not do, if one has kept
His bearings wheresoever he has sailed in calm
Or storm, then when great crises come, as come
They must, for one short instant
Ere he yields his will, right looks him squarely
In the face and shows the way of escape.

Jean lay himself to rest but not to sleep;
His hand-bag packed, the little note to place
Upon his plate, 'A Volunteer'; the ten
Long miles whither the train set south at dawn.
He slowly dreamed the old dreams over again,
Their laughter and their tears, their sunshine
And their shadows; smiling at times, at times
With firm-set jaw, at times in quiet peace
That visits little children, and at times
In the bitter storm of agony that comes
To those who try in deeds their noblest thoughts.

At midnight, silently he left the house;
And as the latch clicked after him, he heard
The wail of unrequited love, and felt
The burning gaze that trailed his vanishing form;
But he walked steadily forth, nor turned nor wavered.

IX

JEAN: (musing)

I feel as though my soul had been upon
A toilsome, long and distant journey, alone;
Had known a land of wondrous melodies;
And meditation lingers now and weeps
To find no friend who likewise has been there,
For nothing is of worth to any man
Unless he finds some friend with whom to share it.
Life to me has been a lonely voyage
Upon an unknown sea, and unaccompanied;
Or am I dreaming? Has my mind lost sway,
And is imagination tricking me?

Old hill, here my brave sires have lived and died;
Here once the yule log held the cheery fire,
And happy voices echoed loud and long;
Here ran the brook, and threaded through the hills
This selfsame course; here years have set at naught
The steady-nerved and sturdy-sinewed men,
Have laid them in their feeble shrouds; and now
Six feet of earth has healed the ragged wound
The earth needs suffered for their resting place;
And time speeds on, forgetful they have lived.
All that remains of them is in the offspring

Of their lives and bodies; happy the man
Who sows the world with noble deed and thought;
No grave will ever mark the dust of him
Who has enthroned the truth within his life;
He will live on in others evermore.

Old hill, I am older by a million years
Than you; and you, who knows how long, have stretched
Your arms across the fields, have held in check
The brook, have lifted high the gnarled oaks
In air, have nestled in your lap the golden
Grain. Your fruitage is the sword that grows
Upon your upheaved breast; long centuries
Ago I passed you as I journeyed on
To higher realms; and now my fruitage is
My character, and soul too subtle to
Be held within your groping clay, I carry.

And now, old hill, rich in the treasured past,
I have come to say good-bye to you and yours
Of long ago. You stand and easily
Defy the fickle years; but I go on
And change my course with every shift of moon.
I am pained I cannot live with you my life,
And lay me down at last to slumber on
Your maternal breast, content to dream forever.

Long may you hold the sacred dust of those
Who sleep the careless sleep of centuries.
Oft you have watched me in my romping play,
Have held my truant footprints in your sands,
Oft you have laughed at my wild childish pranks,
Oft you have scolded me when I did wrong.
Now I must kiss you ere I say good-bye,
As I was wont, when but a prattling child,
To kiss the fairy souls of the dreaming rosebuds
That you entwined upon your furrowed brow.
And then with all the simple tenderness
And innocence and faith of a sweet child,
He laid him on his face and kissed the sward
Of the old hill, where reverie so many
Years had pictured home and the varied joys
Of those who live beneath the open sky.

He arose, and turning saw the cross his body
Had imprinted on the dewy grass.
And then the awful stillness of the night
Intensified his utter loneliness
And utter worthlessness; he felt as felt
The first lone man when the first night came down,
Not knowing that again there would be day.
But as the fever in his blood grew cool,

The sweetest breath of heaven that ever fanned
His parched forehead, came to him. It said:

Out of the inmost depths I come,
A silent guest,
Quietly here at your side I stand
With pierced breast;

Once I was lonely and burdened with fear,
Then all forsook me and no one was near;
Once I was wearied and sad evermore,
Viewing earth's travail and sin's open sore.
More subtle than wisdom, more precious than gold;
The crown of earth's treasures in me you shall hold.
More fragrant than perfume that wastes in the dew
Of the first opening rosebud when morning is new.

I will walk at your side o'er the rugged way;
Your burdens I'll carry, nor cause you delay,
I will be your friend in the darkest night,
And share your joys at their loftiest flight;
Come, let us go, life is ever ahead;
Hope haloes the future, the past is now dead;
Come let us go, care will fade from our sight,
In the service we render, all burdens are light;
Come, let us go, there is nothing to fear;
God rules the future, the sky must be clear:—

Out of the unseen depths I come,
A silent friend;
Quietly here at your side let me live,
Our lives to blend.

And thus they started through the wasting night
Ten miles to where the train set south at dawn;
To work a time among the colleges,
To later sail for China o'er the seas.
One was unseen; the other's face was aglow
With a strange and shining radiance; he went
As years before, his sire had gone to fight
For truth, for God and his downtrodden world.
Only no nimble life was there to cheer
The weary heart, no throng was there to inspire;

The God of peace and love and sympathy,
With stainless banner and unsullied life,
Was leading him forth, bravely to do and to dare.
And as they journeyed on, these words consoled
Him many times, although he could not know
The fulness of their meaning yet for years:

We walk along together,
 My Lord and I,
Sharing our sorrows and our joys
 Continually;
We laugh with those who laugh,
We weep with those who mourn,
And lend a helping hand to those
Who lamely travel on forlorn.

My Lord keeps watch upon me
 With piercing glance,
Delving into my secret thoughts
 As we advance;
I look but at the things I know
His eye would have me see,
I turn my back on sin and shame,
When lust and greed conspire with me.

I pity with the pity

He showers on me,

Knowing without his sympathy,

I would not be free;

I love with his abounding love,

The most unlovely that we meet;

And thus together on we go,

Unselfishly and indiscreet.

X

The shout of 'All ashore who are going ashore!'
The scurry of the last prolonged farewells;
The clatter of the trucks; the grating gangway
As the small isthmus drags itself from shore;
The uttermost confusion, sorrow, tears.
And then the silent vibrant life of the ship,
Its every sinew throbbing with pregnant life,
Anxious to fight its course o'er the challenging sea.
The tugs, nosing the prow, sputter and sweat
To turn the quiet, huge, majestic vessel
Which peacefully smiles down upon their effort.
The captain shouts command, the tugs retreat,
The ship tingles anew with sudden energy,
And all the lesser craft, bustling and screaming,
Steer athwart the shore with brooding fear.
Slowly the pier recedes, the waving kerchiefs
Already beckon from a foreign shore;
As the land retreats, the dimpled ocean smiles.

Jean paced the deck, a million miles from home,
In utter isolation scanned the crowds;
With fingers clenched and burning banished heart,
He watched his native land slowly diminish.

JEAN: (musing)

I am neither in the world nor out of it;
Sadness and happiness are of the past;
A sort of philosophic pensiveness
Clutches my soul, throttles my loftier feelings.

Ambition, pride and petty jealousy
Contend for mastery of the aging earth.
Men are but hapless toads which witless leap
Aboard some resting airship; seeing their motion,
In vanity they croak, 'How we do fly.'
The future, lying within the growing womb
Of universal time, beckons them on,
As sin-scarred as a cursed prenatal babe.
The past amazed, survives in motley mein,
Carrying diverse its shifting temperament,
Clouting it on the shoulders of the present.
Unsmudged, my finer sensibility
Silences the bestial riot and the din
Within my secret soul, delves into the past,
Peers at the lives of those who have conquered,
Engraves their images upon my heart,
Filters the truth, discards the symbolism,
Spurs my abated spirit on to the conquest.

Four years ago, I started to reform the world;
And unsophisticated, lavished my life,
Poured out my arterial blood as if 'twere water,
Wasted my youthful vigor and optimism,
Lost in my languor, my footing among the stars.
Luckily I have had my meagre fling at fame,
Have stood before men, have silenced the mean and
vulgar,

Have lorded it over my narrow, local sphere,
Been oft proclaimed among my superiors;
And yet, how little and how mean I feel.
Selfish and petty, I have barked at bawds,
Kicked clownish knaves, and made myself a scourge.
And now I sail away with saddened visage,
And the world wags forward, forgetful I have fought,
Gnaws its materialism and battened riots,
Iconoclastic, crumbles my cherished idols.

A little woman, prematurely aged,
Smiled through a death mask, that unseen proclaimed
The burial of withered blighted hopes.
And when she spoke, in the liquid wine of her speech,
A helpless wail crept out behind each word,
Flavoring all she said with banishment.
She sat unnoticed, marking the restless Jean;

With tears half-stifled, though with hopes alert,
She saw the youthful man whom she had known,
Laughter-loving and brave, care-free and wavering,
Now brow-contracted and tragic in his manner,
Half-thwarted and bowed in his forlorn aspect.

When he abruptly halted as if by magic,
And thrust his fiery face down at her own,
Her blinded eyes were conscious of his features,
She seemed to hear him stammer, 'Lillian',
As she fell limp and headlong on the deck.
As she awoke from stupor, she dreamed she uttered
The name long clasped within her inmost heart.
Her opening eyes leapt wildly around the circle
Of downturned faces, then wearily reposed,
For Jean had vanished, fearing publicity,
Excusing his absence to fetch the ship's physician.
When he returned, dragging the cursing doctor,
Lillian sat silent and white, peering into
The blue of the mingling blended sky and sea.
The matronly woman whose kindly arm sustained her,
Stared at Jean as though she believed him a villain.
The physician, bursting with anger, took the pulse,
Spat the word, 'fainted', then stalked away,
Commanding that she retire to her stateroom.
Jean stood aside as the woman led her within.

Through the slow evening and far into the night,
The lonely man patrolled the friendless deck,
Gazed at the billowy foam, studied the stars,
Mused and was silent, brooding over his past,
Dreaming of golden hair and eyes of blue.

JEAN: (musing)

How came she hither, and why? Perchance
By fate. As the wise God ordains, no doubt.
For years I have lived, sealing my bursting heart,
Lying with separate mind unto my soul,
Crushing my heart out with my deluded head.
Surely 'twas not through knowledge of me she came.
Our lives are not our own to will and do;
God leads us though we see no guiding hand.
He knew the empty throb of my shriveled heart,
Knew of the struggle that would go on for years,
Pitied perchance his blind and erring child.

Next morning, ere 'twas day, as the rifted clouds
Purpled, reddened, glowed, with awaking Aurora,
Two figures stood at the prow, their eyes toward the
East,
Their senses full of the swish and swirl of the ocean.

JEAN:

How came you hither so unexpectedly?

LILLIAN:

I came following blindly the way God led;
Fearing, trembling, doubting the call of duty.

JEAN:

Are you the Lillian I knew of yore,
The sunny girl—

LILLIAN:

I am at last a woman!
The way has been so long, the path so steep,
So briny have been the tears, so sad the smiles,
That I fear I am a very different creature.

JEAN:

Tell me about your past.

LILLIAN:

I have no past;
You opened my soul, and since I have steadfast kept
My eyes toward the East, my mind on the growing
future.

I have steadily buried in tears my yesterdays,

For after you all other men were mean
And hungry-eyed with greed.

JEAN:

I seem to hear,
But understand not.

LILLIAN:

Hear then and know
From mine own lips: you thought me a simpering girl;
I saw myself reflected in your eyes;
And then I saw what you would have me be;
And from this knowledge, there grew a struggling woman,
Created from the thought within your breast.

JEAN:

This is strange indeed; the simpering girl,
With sunny smiles and laughing, roguish eyes,
Has been within the depth of my hidden heart,
The sole possession of my recurring dreams.
I have woven her spirit in rhyme for memory:

Thornless and fragrant, pure and white,
These were the roses she wore last night;
At the close of only another day,
Their fragrance has vanished, their petals decay;
A year they lived for one brief hour;
The spreading leaf, the opening flower,
Ate the sunshine, drank the dew,
And glancing upward, ever grew;
Life and youth flowed through their being,
Blindly groping, without seeing
Who should wear them near her heart,
Who should kiss them with lips apart.

And she who wore the roses white,
Dancing and smiling bloomed last night;
For twenty summers she has grown,
Has wildly wondered, yet never has known;
As a wind which bloweth out of the sky,
From whence none knows nor questions why,
The mystery of love is blind,
The senses are cloyed and clouded the mind;
And she with a modest and winsome grace;
With an airy bearing and innocent face,
Felt the sting as of an arrow,
And knew youth's love though not love's sorrow;
And I who wore her near my heart,
Tenderly kissed her with lips apart.

LILLIAN:

Your heart felt this; your mind rebelled; religion
Palsied the struggling deed.

JEAN:

These same two eyes,
Tinged like the sea where yonder waking sun
Breaks through a rift of cloud, illumined my dreams;
This soothing voice pierced my closed ears as this prow
The waves, with a liquid laughter.

The Knight of the Chinese Dragon.

LILLIAN:

So you thought,
Enchanted by my absence; but had I
Been near you, nausea would have repelled you.

JEAN:

How came you hither so unexpectedly?

LILLIAN:

To minister to those in sore distress.

JEAN:

Strange, indeed!

LILLIAN:

Strange that you should think it thus;
For woman ever has been God's ministering angel.

JEAN:

But you were so removed from seriousness,
So engrossed with life.

LILLIAN:

The heart is louder than
The head when God listens; the life more weighty
Than the lips when Jehovah holds the trembling balance;

Preaching is pious and wise; living is lax
And faulty in the eyes of man; the male
Is wise, the female foolish; thus it has been
Since time began.

JEAN:

But tell me how you came
Hither?

LILLIAN:

When I went home from finishing college,
I was near mad with anguish; thwarted in love,
My passions shackled; ambitionless and fickle,
I tried to die. My father wished me to marry
His junior partner, thrifty, young and handsome;
But ever your image flitted between our faces,
Dazzled my eyes; I refused, therefore, his offer.
My father, perplexed and angered, tried to force
His will upon me, but I flatly refused
To yield. Had mother been alive, I would
Have fared less foul; but a lone and helpless child,
My father crushed me and I fled from home.

A crumpled, half-blown rosebud, I thrust myself
Among strangers, writhing in pain and anguish.
Smarting beneath your stinging accusation
Of worthlessness, I resolved to be of use

In the world; utterly abandoning my selfish past,
I became a nurse, ministered unto the sick
And dying, wasted my willing energy
Day after day, and night after sleepless night.
During the busy while, I read many books
Of the awakening heart of the fossilized, mummified
Orient;

Thought of my fabled knight of the Chinese dragon.
God quietly whispered through the written page
His plan for my unsettled life, confided it to me
In silence ever more golden as time advanced.
I promised to follow the way that seemed to him best.

One day a message came which told that Father
Was stricken. I hastened breathless home to his hearth,
Only to find him dying the death of a miser.
After I left him, he made his money his god,
Cursed all things else, nor received the comfort of any;
Left a curious will whereby I was
Deprived of half the estate unless I married.
And when I stoutly refused the numerous offers,
People thought me deranged, crazed by my creed.

And when I later gave the whole estate
Without reserve, to found in the depths of China
A medical mission, my relatives had me detained

On the charge of being insane, hoping thus
To secure a share of my wealth. Within the asylum,
God spake again unto my questioning spirit;
And I in answer promised to obey.
The voice straightway replied, thy gift in gold
Is dross unless thou givest thyself, go thou
With thy life to minister unto the needy.
And then after several months, the tardy law,
Helmeted in greed, besmirched with bribes,
Grasping after my wealth, came to the rescue.
Released at length, I hastened on my journey;
And thus far I have come.

JEAN:

Let us go back;
The heathen are at home and not in China;
Ananias rules, and all the covetous world
Yields him its tribute in lies.

LILLIAN:

God rules the world;
We are his ministers, and though we give
Our bodies to be burned, and have not love
For our bitterest enemies, it profiteth nothing.

JEAN:

Can you forgive the greed, the selfishness,
The vice? My spirit burns—

LILLIAN:

They know not what
They do; they see but countless shadows, weird,
Distorted—

JEAN:

They make no attempt to see the truth.

LILLIAN:

Judge them not; in God's scheme of the world
Their places are as needful as ours.—But how
Came you upon this journey?

JEAN:

I came alone,
Worm-eaten by loneliness and stifled passion,
Railing against the world, discouraged quite
With myself, unnerved and sad.

LILLIAN:

Turn then to singing!
God rules our imperfect lives; his world is won,

The Knight of the Chinese Dragon.

Not through the blating blare of honking horns,
Nor through the gaudy gear of proclamation;
But silently, obscurely, meanly clad,
His minions go stealing the hearts of men from error.
Our service is his hope; our little lives
Will echo around the world, it will be told
In centuries to come, that we were salt
To the stench of the wicked.

JEAN:

My pride is withered and dead;
Once I traversed the stars of the milky way;
Now I grovel impotent.

LILLIAN:

Something for months has whispered
That you had need of me. God told me as much;
In the silent hours of my life, I heard your want:
The despair of loneliness, the need of a friend.
I will be to you a loyal sister.

JEAN:

A wife!

LILLIAN:

Nay, that I cannot be; God told me as much

When he led me forth; I have work in the world to do,
A message to proclaim.

JEAN:

Heard you aright?

LILLIAN:

I did! No man must fetter my usefulness;
I have a place that no one else can fill.

JEAN:

I have a place I cannot fill unaided;
I need the constant wine of your singing soul;
My spirit has shrivelled not finding its kindred being.
You must consent to help me, for alone
I am a groveling worm; with your support,
I could stand erect.

LILLIAN:

Ever the old excuse:

Out of the endless past, the perishing man
Cries for a woman's staff; and then straightway
Tramples her pitiless under the cruel heel
Of his ambition.

JEAN:

We are to be companions;
You shall have your work and I shall have mine;
Alone we are but half ourselves, but together, we
Would be happy and wholesome, strewing the world with
joy.

Thus they filled the day with argument till even.
Lillian, entering her room alone, reclined,
Troubled, wavering, fearing, groping for light.
God in the silence spoke, and hushed her trembling heart.
Jean struggled over his pleasureless past;
And after a time, his feeling found a voice,
And poured its tempest out in verse; at last,
After what seemed eternities, the morning
Awakening smiled as Jean recounted his past.

JEAN:

Here again, I have brought my little verses;
They have grown out of my bitter, sorrowing life.

As one who girdles all alone the earth,
Returning finds no sympathizing ear
His strange wild tales of land and sea to hear,
Finds no response in story or in mirth,
Sits disappointed at his lonely hearth,
And dreams of old familiar faces dear,
That once were wont to lend their hearty cheer,
But now are gone, robbing from life its worth:
So I, a traveler, trod life's lonely way
Until your hidden heart unclosed to me;
That instant leapt my soul to greet the day;
Instinctively we soon were far at sea;
Our lives, adrift so long in lands unknown,
Had traversed the same continents alone.

How many were the years I searched for you,
Wondering and fearing lest in land and sea
No soul were rhymed with mine in tide and lea,
The anxious while my life the lonelier grew;
I grappled from the surging throng a few
Sweet souls that came in trust and joy to me,
Thinking our spirits would in love agree,
But faltering did my airy hopes eschew:
In you I find the lodestone of my heart,
And as the needle swings unto its pole,
So ever will my life its flame impart,
And evermore will seek your potent soul:
What matters though the waiting years were long,
Our ship sings through the spray, and love is strong.

You smiling loved me in your woman's way:
Life's compensation then was manifest,
The meaning of the years filled me with zest:
I knew why pain along the journey lay,
Why loneliness and sighs did me assay,
I saw why goodness battled within my breast,
Why fitful life would know no peace or rest,
Why mother pressed my baby lips to pray:
All strove that I might offer you a life,
Forewarned by stumbling near the hidden brink
Of ruin, poised to meet life's certain strife,
Unsullied that my lips love's joys might drink;
All strove thus long that home for you and me
A perfect haven of hopefulness should be.

We quarreled, and then for years misunderstood;
My wounded breast burned in a silent flame,
Consuming its own smoke; do not it blame,
Man ever hides the passions that him flood;
Your woman's heart wrote in its bickering blood
The record of the fears it could not name,
The tears its yearning passion fought to tame,
The years it had endured the deadening mood;
I played the man, and did my thoughts disdain;
Though I had gladly borne your load and mine
Could I have saved you any needless pain,
Have changed the draught of your twice bitter
 wine;

However, life's blood roses e'er adorn
A stem beset with many a biting thorn.

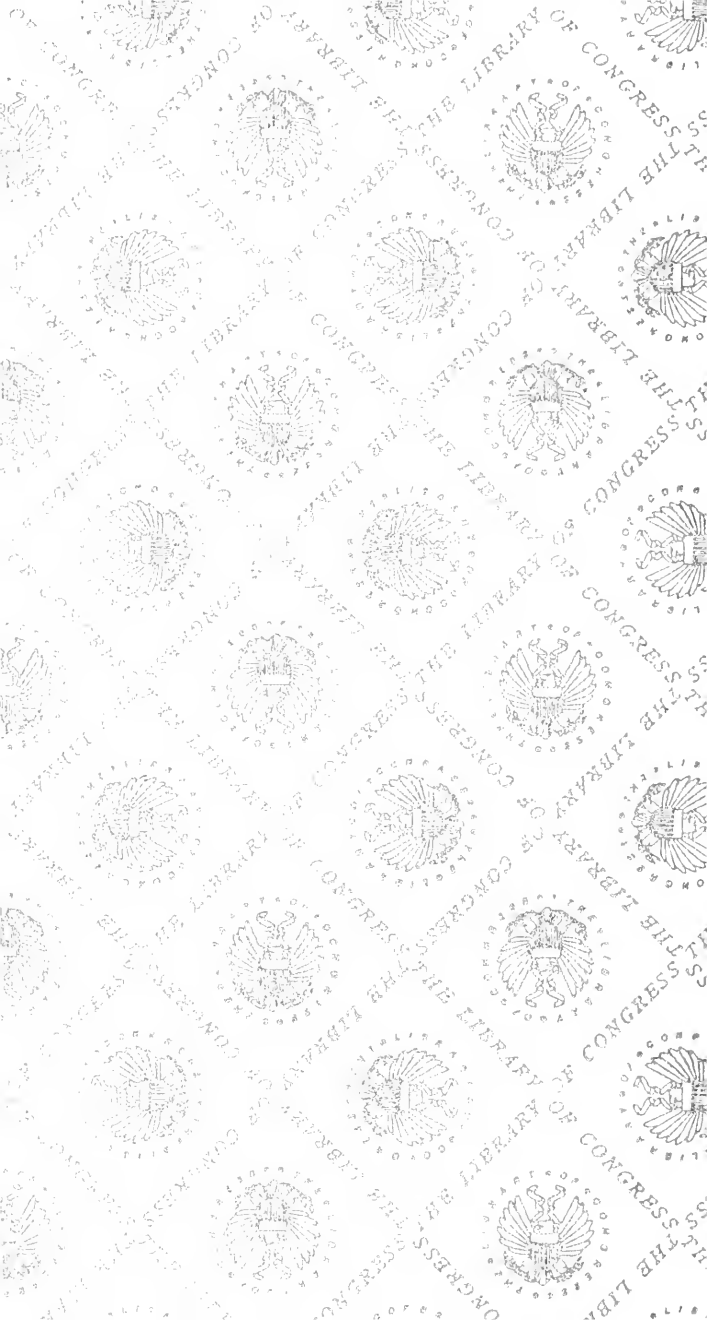
I come to offer you my hungry heart;
It has been feeding on the thought of you
As a wild red rose is fed by sun and dew,
It has been famished when we were apart,
It has suffered many a secret chilling start
Alone in fear lest love might prove untrue,
Lest your life's winsome wine should not renew,
It has been faint fearing love would depart:
I do not vow love's common noisy vow,
Nor swear that I will be forever thine,
I lay my naked soul before you now,
Words but profane this offering of mine:
You smile, and in your look of love I see
Earth rivals paradise for you and me.

And as she read, the tears gushed forth in streams.
Her heart had conquered, and her spirit knew
That God smiled, and 'twas morning on the sea
Of her awakening life. Jean, too, felt the tides
Of youthful optimism reflood his soul;
The future beckoned afar with its cheery visage;
The hunger of years at last was satisfied.
Each soul had found its harbor; and as the vessel
Splashed through the spray and bounded over the waves,
Together their hearts throbbed wildly this refrain:

Banished together, we sail o'er the sea;
God is our pilot, and nothing fear we;
Knitted together by fate's daring hand,
We laugh o'er the ocean, we leap o'er the strand;
Teeming with passion, our hearts are aflame,
Winning the world from its sloth and its shame;
Fettered to faith and harnessed to hope,
Love lures us forth in the conquest to cope:
Banished together we sail o'er the sea;
God is our pilot, and nothing fear we.

THE END.

W 13



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We're Quality Bound

